

A GENEALOGY OF HUMILITY: FROM TORAH TO THE
FOURTH CENTURY CE

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ABSTRACT

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The main purpose of this study is to understand the rhetoric of humility of fourth-century Christianity and its historical and theological background. The co-existence of the rising of Christianity as a state religion and the emphasis on the virtue of humility is interesting, if one understands that the idea of humble/humility in the Greco-Roman world is basically a vice that mostly refers to the opposite of the human ideal. When this observation is combined with the books of the Hebrew Bible that use the term humble/humility both positively and more often negatively, some questions arise: What did the virtue of humility mean to fourth-century Christianity? Where did this notion of humility as a virtue come from? How did the New Testament use the idea? To answer these questions, the terms for humble/humility in both Hebrew and Greek culture, their semantic range, and how they were used will be examined in the historical-critical manner. The messages of Matthew and Luke will be read based on a historical-critical study on the virtue of humility in both Hebrew and Greek cultures. Then, this investigation will reflect upon the political situation of the church during the fourth century that cradled ascetic monasticism.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
CCEL	<i>Christian Classics Ethereal Library</i>
HADOT	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i>
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>

To my wonderful parents in South Korea and my lovely wife Soojin

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Benedict of the 6th century said, “Humility is the ability to know ourselves as God knows us and to know that it is the little we are that is precisely our claim on God.”¹ This highly spiritual definition has been widely accepted by various monastic traditions and reaffirmed and polished by one of the religious authorities named Bernard, the abbot of Clairvaux, in the twelfth century.² This definition survived through the era of the Reformation and the Enlightenment,³ and even today it is one of the most popular definitions of humility among Christian thinkers.⁴ However, the popularity of it does not mean that it exactly represents what the Bible would say about the idea of humility. In fact, there is a huge theological, cultural, and linguistic gap between the notion of humility in the Bible, which is extremely ambiguous in meaning, and what Benedict said about humility.

¹ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 73-74.

² Bernard, *The Steps of Humility*, trans. George B. Burch (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1942), 123.

³ William Allen, *A Practical Discourse of Humility* (London: Printed for Walter Kettilby, 1681). John Norris, *A Practical Treatise Concerning Humility: Design'D for the Furtherance and Improvement of That Great Christian Vertue, Both in the Minds and Lives of Men* (London: Printed for S. Manship, 1707). Isaac Watts, *Humility Represented in the Character of St. Paul: The Chief Springs of it Opened, and Its Various Advantages Display'D; Together With Some Occasional Views of the Contrary Vice* (London: Printed for R. Ford and R. Hett, 1737).

⁴ Cf. Roberta C. Bondi, “Humility: A Meditation on an Ancient Virtue for Modern Christians,” *Quarterly Review* 3, no. 4 (1983): 27; Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 238.

There are a number of biblical passages where the humble/humility language refers to nothing but a negative socio-economic experience of people. Furthermore, in the secular Greek literature, humility is not understood as a virtue. No doubt, as any other religious concepts might, the idea of humility has gone through numerous historical stages and theological twists from biblical times to the sixth century. In other words, Benedict is indebted to his forerunners who meditated on humility.

One of the most important historical stages for the development of the idea of humility is the time of Emperor Constantine “the Great.” In the beginning of the fourth century, Emperor Constantine of the West and Licinius Augustus of the East together performed a memorable work for the Church. They made the “Edict of Milan” to announce that Christianity would officially be one of the religions in the Roman empire and they would put the public persecution of Christianity to an end. Furthermore, the edict specifically ordered the restitution of the properties confiscated from Christians. It says:

All these places must forthwith be handed over to the body of the Christians through your intervention and without any delay. ‘And since these same Christians are known to have possessed not only the places in which they had the habit of assembling but other property too which belongs by right to their body - that is, to the churches not to individuals - you will order all this property, in accordance with the law which we have explained above, to be given back without any equivocation or dispute at all to these same Christians, that is to their body and assemblies, preserving always the principle stated above, that those who restore this same property as we have enjoined without receiving a price for it may hope to secure indemnity from our benevolence.’⁵

⁵ Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, trans. ed. J. L. Creed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 50.8-9.

The implication of this political move was huge beyond measure. To the Christians whose memory of the Emperor Valerian of the third century and Diocletian in the beginning of the fourth century was still fresh, it was joyful news of victory. Christians did not need to be afraid of the systematic persecution driven by the Roman government any more. All the stories of pain and suffering under the tyranny of Roman leaders, due to their Christian faith and rejection of pagan gods, including the divinized emperors, would exist only in their literature and memory. Furthermore, the Church could enjoy security that the state would provide and perhaps accumulate wealth.

As any human society or organization would expect, there were some problems created by those who took advantage of this new situation for selfish reasons. Even though there is not much detailed reporting on what the bishops did with the money of the church secured by the Edict of Milan, not long after, the canon seventeen of the Council of Nicaea had to clearly set a rule that bishops should not gain profit out of loaning money and it specifically mentioned the consequence of it:

Seeing that many of those enrolled in the clergy, being full of greed and of a shameful money-grubbing spirit, have forgotten the sacred word which says that "he did not give his money out for interest" and who in lending out their money require a certain percentage in return, the holy and great council has judged it just that if anyone, after the publication of this decree, takes interest for a loan or, for whatever reason, holds back half of the loan or invents another thing with the mind to realize a shameful profit, he shall be deposed from the clergy and taken off the clergy list.⁶

Of course the practice of lending money among the church leaders was not a new phenomenon. In the third century, Cyprian already showed his hatred of usury among

⁶ Peter L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 75.

Christians in his letter to Quirinus.⁷ Canon twenty of the Council of Elvira also shortly states that the cleric who takes interest from lending money must be deposed.⁸ By the time Constantine called the Council of Nicaea, however, usury seems to have been more widely practiced. This phenomenon is well reflected in the writings of the contemporary church leaders such as Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and others who were against this practice.⁹ In order to keep her spiritual purity, the Church and the leaders had to fight the basic human desire for wealth and power well nurtured by the Edict of Milan and the support of the Roman government. However, the fervency of the Christian thinkers against such a practice did not last long. In 348, Canon IV of the Council of Laodicea shows signs of giving way to usury as a common practice by deleting the penalty that had been stated in the previous Council of Nicaea.¹⁰

With the historical vortex that changed the political and economic landscape of Christianity in the fourth century, it is clearly observed that there came a rapid rise of emphasis on the virtue of humility among Christians. TLG¹¹ shows that the Greek words *tapeinos* and its cognates that might refer to humble/humility in English occur in the known Greek literature, both secular and religious, including the Septuagint, the New Testament, and the early Christian writings, approximately three thousand times from the seventh century BCE to the third century CE. Suddenly, they occur over six thousand

⁷ Cyprian, *Treatise XII: Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews* 3.48 (ANF 5:546).

⁸ Karl Joseph von Hefele, et al., *A History of the Councils of the Church, From the Original Documents*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), 145.

⁹ Henry R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, (NPNF 14:37).

¹⁰ Ibid., 126.

¹¹ *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, <http://www.tlg.uci.edu/>.

times in the fourth century alone and most of them are found in Christian writings that diligently point out humble/humility as a Christian virtue.

It seems that the ascetic monks are partly responsible for this sudden emphasis on the virtue of humility. As the church was gaining political power in Roman society, some Christians went to the desert instead of enjoying the religious freedom just now given to them. Then the virtue of humility was diligently meditated upon, taught, practiced, and vividly displayed by their teaching and life style. They praised the virtue of humility and this virtue soon became one of the central virtues, if not the most important, of monasticism for the following centuries. Just like the ascetic monks in the monasteries, bishops also began putting much emphasis on humility. Bishops like Athanasius and Chrysostom in the fourth century used the Greek term *tapeinos* and its cognates more often than any other. Soon, this virtue of humility became a rhetoric that many Christian writers used in their discussions.

Observing this historical and literary phenomenon concerning the Greek root *tapein* in the fourth century, one might ask some questions: Is it just a coincidence that the great celebration of religious freedom initiated by the Edict of Milan and the rise of ascetic monasticism appeared in the same century? Is it just a coincidence that the beginning of the Church's accumulation of power and the beginning of the emphasis on humble/humility as a virtue appeared in the same century? In trying to answer these questions, the main portion of this study is dedicated to understanding the idea of humility not only in the context where Christianity was born, but also in the process of its

historical development from the biblical culture to the fourth century Christian world, and its meaning to early ascetic monasticism and the leaders of the Church.¹²

PROBLEMS IN HUMBLE/HUMILITY LANGUAGE

Without doubt, humility is known to be one of the most popular ideas in Jewish-Christian literature. The Hebrew Bible seems to strongly advocate humility as a propitious virtue and remedy for many unwanted problems, whether spiritual, financial, or physical, specifically in the writings and prophets. Humility (נָּפַר) goes before honor (Prov. 15:33; 18:12) and the reward for humility (נָּפַר) is riches and honor and life (Prov. 22:4). Zephaniah asks the reader to seek humility (נָּפַר) to avoid the impending wrath of the Lord (Zeph. 2:3).

In the New Testament, humility is often commended by Paul and the Pauline school as a spiritual practice that would lead Christians to the ideal Christian life (Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3; Col. 2:23). Peter also praises humility in quoting “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” out of Proverbs 3:34 of LXX. James also seems to be a big fan of the virtue of humility. Just like Peter does, he quotes Proverbs 3:34 (James 4:6) and insists that Christians are to be humble, in hopes that God may exalt them in response (James 4:10).

The Scripture seems to not only provide a plethora of advantages of practicing humility as a virtue, both spiritual and earthly, but also to set two most important figures

¹² This study takes Riley’s *The River of God* as its primary model for research. See Gregory J. Riley, *The River of God: A New History of Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 8-11.

as models of humility: Moses and Jesus. Moses is introduced as the most humble (ὑψ) man in the whole world and the account alludes that the LORD protected Moses because of his humility (Num. 12:3).¹³ According to Matthew, Jesus describes himself to be humble (ταπεινός) in heart (Matt. 11:29). Apostle Paul also introduces Jesus as God who humbled (ἐταπείνωσεν) himself (Phil. 2:6-8).

Church history is another avenue where one can observe the popularity of the idea of humility. Throughout the centuries, many Christian thinkers and church leaders, beginning with the words of the ascetic monks of the fourth to the sixth century recorded in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, believed that the virtue of humility is one of the most important virtues, if not the most important. Specifically in the monastic tradition of both east and west, the virtue of humility has been a must if one seeks deeper spirituality.

What is the meaning of the word “humility” then? What does it refer to? As a noun, it should stand for ideas or thoughts in the mind.¹⁴ If one takes the theory of Augustine in learning language,¹⁵ it might seem to be a simple question that requires a simple answer because the word “humility” should refer ostensibly to an image that is

¹³ Of course, since this passage is considered as a later addition by many commentators, there are some issues to discuss about the authenticity of the passage as a source to praise humility. This is discussed in chapter 3. However, one should note that it is not the Scripture but the readers who have taken the passage as the most important compliment to humility.

¹⁴ Dallas M. High, *Language, Persons, and Belief; Studies in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations and Religious Uses of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 29.

¹⁵ “When they called anything by name, and moved the body towards it while they spoke, I saw and gathered that the thing they wished to point out was called by the name they then uttered; and that they did mean this was made plain by the motion of the body, even by the natural language of all nations expressed by the countenance, glance of the eye, movement of other members, and by the sound of the voice indicating the affections of the mind, as it seeks, possesses, rejects, or avoids. So it was that by frequently hearing words, in duly placed sentences, I gradually gathered what things they were the signs of; and having formed my mouth to the utterance of these signs, I thereby expressed my will. Thus I exchanged with those about me the signs by which we express our wishes, and advanced deeper into the stormy fellowship of human life, depending the while on the authority of parents, and the beck of elders.” Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. J. G. Pilkington (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1943), 11.

supposed to be universal to every person. But as Wittgenstein points out in the beginning of his later work *Philosophical Investigations*,¹⁶ as he was departing from what he had thought about language, it is hard to apply Augustine's linguistics to an abstract expression "humility" and it needs more explanation beyond what Augustine's oversimplified thought could demonstrate. An abstract idea is not something one can easily point out, nor can others find by looking at the pointed place or item.

Even taking English only, humility certainly is a difficult word to understand. Everybody uses it. Christians are expected to know about it and practice it in relationship with others and God unless they do not care being called arrogant. It probably is one of the most frequently preached subjects from the pulpit today. However, when asked, one cannot help noticing that it is extremely hard to define the idea of humility.

The irony is that the lack of a clear definition of the idea of humility in the Christian literature does not seem to bother people in using the term. Even Scripture uses the term many times without any definition. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* does not give an explicit and universal definition of humility as a virtue either. Scripture seems to assume that the reader already knows what humility refers to and the early Christian writers up to fifth century did not raise a question about the reason why there is the lack of a definition of humility. They just kept talking and writing about it as if the lack of definition did not really matter.

This difficulty in understanding the term "humility," is widely reflected in many modern dictionaries of Christianity and Judaism. In this case, however, the lack of

¹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, and G. E. M. Anscombe, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), 2-3.

definition is not the problem. What confuses people is the multitude of definitions. The dictionaries provide various definitions that are different from each other. They try to offer historical backgrounds of the idea, but that often creates more questions than answers.

Some dictionaries seems to try to avoid providing any clear definition of it. For example, the language of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* shows its uncomfortable stance in defining the term because the idea of humility is not a fixed one but a progressive idea that changed its connotations along with historical developments: “Originally denoting low estate and the cowardly attitude likely to result from it, in Judaism and especially in Christianity the word acquired more positive connotations.”¹⁷ The *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* has a totally different opinion on humility departing from the traditional view on humility as a virtue. It states, “Though pride is a sin, humility--its opposite--is not so much a virtue as a grace.”¹⁸

HarperCollins' Bible Dictionary presents a different set of problems in explaining the term as setting Jesus as a model. It states, “While Jesus is no arrogant teacher (Matt. 11:29), he does not exhort to traditional self-humiliation but simply to avoid challenging the honor of others” (Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14).¹⁹ However, one can easily raise a question about the statement reflecting upon the challenges Jesus made against the

¹⁷ F. L. Cross, and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, “Humility,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 804.

¹⁸ James F. Childress, and John Macquarrie, “Humility,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 284.

¹⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier, and Roger S. Boraas, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 443.

religious authorities. For example, Luke chapter 20 tells a story of Jesus *dishonoring* the Sadducees by wisely answering their twisted and ill-intended questions. In Mark 12, Jesus openly challenges the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people by telling a parable of the vineyard and slaves.

Some major dictionaries of the Bible totally omit the term “humility” from their contents, which is surprising to those who firmly believe that humility is one of the most important ideas presented in the Bible and Christian history. For example, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, one of the most respected dictionaries of the Christian church today, does not include an article for “humility,” which is supposed be placed between “Humanity” and “Humor,” while it has a long and detailed article for “love,” which is considered as a virtue like humility.²⁰ *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* does not include an article for “humility” either, which might be placed between “Huleh” and “Humtah.”²¹

Some modern Jewish dictionaries are explicit in expressing humility as a Jewish virtue. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* states that humility is an outstanding virtue and it can be ascribed even to God.²² *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* vividly shows its respect toward humility as a virtue: “Humility is one of the virtues most admired and held up as an example among Jews since biblical times.”²³ *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* is very strong in supporting the idea of humility as a Jewish virtue: “In the

²⁰ William Klassen, “Love,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 375-396. Henceforth, *ABD*.

²¹ Allen C Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 507.

²² R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 341.

²³ Geoffrey Wigoder, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 357-358.

Jewish tradition, humility is among the greatest of the virtues, as its opposite, pride, is among the worst of the vices.”²⁴ *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* states, “An outstanding characteristic of the mind of the Bible people is man’s humility in his relationship to God.”²⁵

Non-religion-oriented dictionaries like the second edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, which is specialized neither in Christianity nor Judaism, shows its uncertainty in defining the term “humility.” It has two definitions of the abstract noun “humility.” The first one is positive and it speaks more of socially accepted attitude or virtue: The quality of being humble or having a lowly opinion of oneself; meekness, lowliness, humbleness; the opposite of pride or haughtiness.²⁶ However, a somewhat negative color is pasted on the second definition. The English word “humility” comes from Latin *humus*, the earth or the soil.²⁷ In classical Latin, the word *humilitas* is used to point out the smallness, lowness, lack of elevation or importance of things.²⁸ When it speaks of persons, it refers to the obscurity of their birth, the deletion of their social status, the weakness of their means, the insignificance of their character, or the lack of their

²⁴ Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 255.

²⁵ Sheldon H. Blank, “Humility,” in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia; an Authoritative and Popular Presentation of Jews and Judaism Since the Earliest Times*, ed. Isaac Landman, vol. 5 (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1969), 481.

²⁶ J. A. Simpson, and E. S. C. Weiner, “Humility”, in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 482.

²⁷ Marcel Viller, “Humilité,” in *Dictionnaire De Spiritualité Ascétique Et Mystique: Doctrine Et Histoire*, vol. 7 (Paris: G. Beauchesne et ses fils, 1932), 1136.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1136.

courage.²⁹ In other words, the origin of humility in the classic Latin is a term to negatively depict one's social, political, and economical status.

All these differences in understanding the idea of humility lead to another set of questions: Are all the articles of the various dictionaries simply different perspectives on the same subject? Or, are they different opinions on different subjects that are unfortunately or mistakenly translated as one English word "Humility?" As one tries to answer these questions, he or she may find that the difficulty in understanding the concept of humility of modern times is primarily due to the complexity of the development of the idea of humility in history. The church has wrestled with the idea for a long time, creating many different ideas and attitudes concerning the virtue of humility. For example, "Whether humility is the greatest of the virtues?" was a question a Dominican monk named Thomas Aquinas, a doctor of the church in the thirteenth century, had to answer in his exhaustive work *Summa Theologica*³⁰ as dealing with various virtues and vices. His initial and somewhat ambiguous answer is "no" based on Colossians 3:14 that puts charity above all virtues. Nevertheless, despite the answer, simply by raising the question he shows the historical traces of how popular the idea of humility is in the church as one of the strong candidates for the greatest Christian virtues in his day, and the tradition set before him as he unfolds a series of objections.

²⁹ N. I. Herescu, "Homo-Humus-Humanitas," in *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, no. 5 (June 1948): 68-69.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 2, Second Part of the Second Part, Q. 161, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc. 1947), 1851. He also asks the same kind of question as he deals with Obedience (Q. 104), Patience (Q. 136), Temperance (Q. 142), Virginity (Q. 152), and Clemency and Meekness (Q. 157).

Unquestionably, as a person who knew the monastic life, Aquinas already was familiar with old teachings on the virtue of humility that had survived about a millennium among Christian monks and thinkers. He certainly knew the twelve degrees of humility in the Rule of “the Blessed Benedict.”³¹ A century before Aquinas’ days, Bernard, the abbot of Clairvaux, published *The Steps of Humility*, a lengthy meditation on *Benedictine Rules* that defines humility as the way to truth.³² It is obvious that Aquinas also knew his works, considering his many quotes from Bernard as he deals with the questions on the unity of God or angels³³ in the *Summa Theologica*. In Aquinas’ discussion, another historical figure he respectfully pays much attention to is Augustine. It is very observable that his discussion of humility heavily depends upon the theological authority of Augustine’s theology of humility: He quotes from Augustine’s works fourteen times in this relatively short discussion and he clearly knows that Augustine has once said, “Thou wishest to be great, begin from the least. Thou art thinking to construct some mighty fabric in height; first think of the foundation of humility.”³⁴

Aquinas’ respect toward Augustine in handling the virtue of humility seems to be a right move because Augustine, as an ascetic monk and bishop in the 5th century, greatly valued the virtue of humility and left many works on the idea. In his work, *The City of God*, Augustine begins with an awareness:

The work is great and difficult, but God is my helper. Well do I know the powers needed to persuade the proud how great is the virtue of humility,

³¹ Ibid. 1852.

³² Bernard, *Steps of Humility*, 123.

³³ *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1, First Part, Q. 11 and Q 50-64.

³⁴ Augustine, *Sermons on New-Testament Lessons* 92.6 (NPNF¹ 6:534).

that lofty quality by which our city is raised above all earthly heights that are rocked by ever-streaming time, not raised by the devices of human arrogance but by the endowment of grace divine.³⁵

For him, humility makes people subject to God, so that it exalts them.³⁶ Thus, he does not hesitate to say: "... Humility is specially recommended to the city of God as it sojourns in this world, and is specially exhibited in the city of God, and in the person of Christ its King; while the contrary vice of pride, according to the testimony of the sacred writings, specially rules his adversary the devil."³⁷ "Man fell through pride; He restored him through humility."³⁸

Augustine of course did not stand alone in praising the virtue of humility and its theological consequences. Even before his time, the idea of humility as a virtue was immensely popular among the ascetic monks in the deserts with the rise of Christian monasticism. They, Greek and Syriac, have always viewed humility as the mother of all other virtues.³⁹

In the philosophy of the ascetic monks, no other virtue was possible to be grasped by a monk without gaining humility first. This idea is well attested in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Anthony, who is considered the greatest teacher of all ascetic monks, and who made a huge impact on Augustine's conversion,⁴⁰ says, "I saw the snares that the

³⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. George E. McCracken, vol. 1 in *The City of God against the Pagans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1. Preface.

³⁶ Ibid., 14.13.

³⁷ Ibid., 14.13.

³⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 1.14.

³⁹ Tomas Spidlik, S. J., *The Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1986), 88.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8.6.15.

enemy spreads out over the world and I said, groaning, ‘What can get through from such snares?’ then I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Humility.’”⁴¹ In the life of ascetic monks, one of their purposes is to gain virtues. As time allows, the monks are to learn and practice virtues. However, what Anthony saw in his vision were the snares that would keep him from gaining these virtues. To him, it seems impossible to break through all those barriers to gain and practice virtues. However, the voice says that there is only one way to gain virtues. It is through humility.

Many desert abbas and ammas in the fourth and fifth centuries are more explicit in praise of humility as a virtue. John the Dwarf says, “Humility and the fear of God are above all virtues.”⁴² Amma Syncletica says, “Just as one cannot build a ship unless one has some nails, so it is impossible to be saved without humility.”⁴³ Abba John of the Thebaid says, “First of all the monk must gain humility; for it is the first commandment of the Lord who said, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’”⁴⁴ Abba Or says, “The crown of the monk is humility.”⁴⁵ Abba Poemen says, “Life in the monastery demands three things: the first is humility.”⁴⁶ Amma Theodora says, “Neither asceticism, nor vigils nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that... Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?”⁴⁷

⁴¹ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1975), 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

About the importance of the virtue of humility to the early monastic life, Douglas

Burton-Christie states:

“Humility was the starting point for the desert monks... In their quest for this virtue of lowliness, then, the desert fathers showed themselves to be deeply influenced by the Christian ethos. Humility was in fact a characteristically Christian virtue and its pursuit by the monks distinguished their quest for holiness in important ways from that found among contemporary pagans.”⁴⁸

Burton-Christie’s observation is correct in that the Christian monks were radically different from the “pagan” world regarding the idea of humility. Unlike other virtues like courage, wisdom, or hope that could be valued by both “pagans” and Christians, the word “humble (ταπεινός)” that Jesus used to describe himself in Matthew 11:29 did not refer to a virtue in the Greco-Roman culture in general. In other words, the question of Aquinas, “Whether humility is the greatest of the virtues?” could not even come into existence in the Greco-Roman mind.

It is not hard to find the practice of compiling lists of virtues in ancient Greco-Roman literature. However, among those virtues humility finds no place. For example, in conversation with Glaucon, Plato suggests four virtues: wise (σοφία), brave (ἀνδρεία), sober (σώφρων), and just (δικαία).⁴⁹ Aristotle, on the other hand, writes that human beings are born just (δίκαιοι), capable of temperance (σωφρονικοί), brave (ἀνδρείοι), and possessed of the other virtues.⁵⁰ Diogenes Laertius also states in dealing with Zeno’s philosophy, “The following are the primary: wisdom (φρόνησιν), courage (ἀνδρείαν),

⁴⁸ Douglas Burton-Christie, 236.

⁴⁹ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1969) 4.427. In another case, Plato adds holiness to the list. See Plato, *Protagoras*, 329-330.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 6.13.5-6.

justice (δικαιοσύνην), temperance (σωφροσύνην). Particular virtues are magnanimity (μεγαλοψυχίαν), continence (ἐγκράτειαν), endurance (καρτερίαν), presence of mind (ἀγχίνοιαν), good counsel (εὐβουλίαν).⁵¹

Worse, humility in the Greco-Roman culture was often something to avoid at every cost. Herodotus shows a good example; in book 7 of *Historiae*, he writes about a dream of Xerxes, the son of Darius, who did not want to go to battle against Hellas. A divine figure said to Xerxes, “This shall be the outcome of it (making peace with Hellas), that as a little while made thee great and mighty, so in a moment shalt thou be brought low (ταπεινός) again.”⁵² No wonder, in their lexicon, Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott find that *ταπεινός* is mostly negative in Greek literature. The word denotes “humbled, abased in power” or “downcast, dejected.”⁵³ Specifically, it is striking to modern Christians that they find it can refer to “mean, base, abject in a moral sense.” In Greek literature *ταπεινός* is a vice. For example, Plato juxtaposes *ταπεινοῦς* (humble) with *ἀγρία* (savage), *δούλωσις* (enslaving), *ἀνελευθέρους* (servile), and *μισανθρώπους* (misanthropic), to show the negative result that the opposite of luxurious living may bring.⁵⁴

Humility was not a virtue among the Latin-speaking late antiquity writers either. Cicero, for example, a Roman statesman, lawyer, political theorist, and philosopher, also

⁵¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1931), 7.92.

⁵² Herodotus, *Historiae*, in *Herodotus*, trans. A. D. Godley, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1963), 7.14.7.

⁵³ Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, comp., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. and augm. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 1757.

⁵⁴ Plato, *Laws*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 7.791.D.

uses the term *humili* (humble), from which the English “humility” is derived, in a very negative sense. In his *De Officiis*, he talks about the war between Rome and Hannibal. Here he uses the term *humili* with craven, abject, and broken in spirit as marks of disgrace. He concludes his discussion with a remark that such acts done by *humili* are shameful (*flagitiosa*), dishonorable (*foeda*), and immoral (*turpia*).⁵⁵

The perplexity of understanding the idea of humility is observed within the New Testament too. The most obvious example is Matthew 23:12: “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.” In this passage, simply by changing the voice of the verb, (ταπεινωθήσεται to ταπεινώσει) the negative sense of the word seems to become positive. Another example might be Acts 8:33 where the eunuch is supposedly reading a passage of Isaiah 53. Here he reads, “In his humiliation (ταπεινώσει) justice was denied him.” Certainly, ταπεινώσει in this verse is not a description of a recommendable virtue. It is a testimony of how justice collapsed in humiliation.

The idea of humility presented in the Hebrew Bible, which is a theological and ethical foundation of many writings of the New Testament and Christian literature, and therefore influencing the New Testament understanding of the idea of humility, is also vague and perplexing. As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew Bible considers humility a virtue in many places. However, this is not always the case. The very same word “humility” in Hebrew is used in many cases as a curse or social debasement that human beings want to avoid if possible. Although הָפַח is the most popular root of many words in the Hebrew

⁵⁵ Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 3.115.

Bible that are translated as “humility” or “humble” in a positive sense, in more cases the same root makes words that refer to negative experiences such as sexual abuse (Deut. 22:24; 2 Sam. 13:14) or physical/mental oppression (Gen. 31:50; Exod. 22:22).

Considering the fact that the Greco-Roman world was not merely a context of Christianity but a tributary that delivered a huge amount of theology and understanding of humanity to the early Church,⁵⁶ the sharp contrast between early monasticism and the Greco-Roman understanding of the word “humility” leads to another set of questions that are different from the questions asked above: Where did this notion of humility in the monastic movement come from? Is the idea of humility as a virtue a radical invention of the early Christian monks? Is it a rediscovery or a continuation of the biblical teachings?

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

The following chapters will proceed with three basic guidelines. First, this study fully recognizes that the same word “humility” in both Hebrew and Greek can be used in different manners in different contexts. MacIntyre has rightly stated, “There is no such thing as justice-as-such, but only justice-as-understood-in-Athens and justice-as-understood-in-Thebes and justice-as-understood-in-Sparta.”⁵⁷ Thus, this study tries to figure out the semantic range of various Hebrew and Greek words that denote the English word “humility” or “humble” according to various contexts: Hebrew Bible, Greco-Roman world, New Testament, and the early Church. Without doubt, this study assumes

⁵⁶ See Gregory J. Riley, *The River of God: A New History of Christian Origins* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 2001), 4-5.

⁵⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 130.

that the virtue of humility was used rhetorically in response to particular historical and theological contexts.

Second, the idea of humility in the writings of the early church is a result of many thoughts of surrounding cultures that have been there for centuries. Gregory J. Riley rightly says about this phenomenon, “A culture tells its members stories that embody its ideals and reinforce social norms and goals.”⁵⁸ This means, whether positive or negative, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Greco-Roman world in which the Church found its place played a role in developing the idea of humility as a virtue in the monastic tradition of the fourth century. Thus, this study tries to see the concept of humility in terms of a continuation of theological and cultural development.

Third, this study recognizes that humility in the language of the Hebrew Bible, Greek literature, the New Testament, and the monasticism of the fourth century not only reflects a theological-spiritual sense but also a socio-economic sense. For example, the Hebrew Word עני has little to do with spirituality in the Pentateuch but is used in many cases simply to refer to the “poor, afflicted, or humiliated.” So it is with ταπεινός in Greek culture and the New Testament. This socio-economic sense of humility is clearly reflected in the ascetic life style of the monastic monks. For example, Abba Gelasius is famous for his life of poverty as an anchorite; he is known to have lived in a single cell to the end, and he was against even having two tunics.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Gregory J. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs: How Jesus Inspired Not One True Christianity, But Many* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 15.

⁵⁹ *Sayings*, 49.

Chapter two reviews scholarship on the study of humility as a virtue beginning with the work of Bernard (1090-1153) titled *De Gradibus Humilitatis*. The review of Alfonso Rodriguez's *A Treatise of Humility*⁶⁰ and William Allen's *A Practical Discourse of Humility*⁶¹ in the seventeenth century will form a bridge between the time of Bernard and modern scholarship on humility. In the twentieth century, scholars began philological studies on humility based on the Bible and its surrounding cultures. Among them, Klaus Wengst plays an important role since he is the first one who ever tried to study the virtue of humility in an extensive way in three different contexts: The Greco-Roman tradition, the Hebrew Bible-Jewish tradition, and the earliest Christian tradition.⁶² There have been numerous responses to his work and they will be critically reviewed.

Chapter three will philologically investigate the Hebrew terms translated as humble/humility in English, paying specific attention to the root ענה in an attempt to answer questions like: What are the semantic ranges of these terms? Are there specific genres or groups of writings that use the terms more often? Specifically, Moses, the ideal of all Jewish people, will be discussed based on his description in Numbers 12:3, which says, "Moses is the most humble man on the earth." All of these investigations are to answer a question: What kind of image would the people of the Hebrew Bible picture when they said or heard the Hebrew terms that are translated as "humble" or "humility" in modern-day English Bibles?

⁶⁰ Alfonso Rodriguez, *A Treatise of Humility*, trans. Tobie Matthew (Saint-Omer: Widow of C. Boscard, 1632).

⁶¹ Allen, *Practical Discourse of Humility*.

⁶² Klaus Wengst, *Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated: The transformation of an attitude and its social relevance in Graeco-Roman, Old Testament-Jewish, and Early Christian tradition*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

Chapter four will conduct a historical study of the Greek term ταπεινός and its cognates, which Matthew uses for the self-identification of Jesus in 11:29. This chapter will look at the Greek literature from the eighth century BCE up to the time of Jesus, particularly paying attention to the writers who are known to be widely influential in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Since it is well known already that the Greek word ταπεινός and its cognates in the secular Greek literature primarily have a negative connotation,⁶³ this chapter will discuss more about the possibilities of humility pictured as a virtue in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Chapter five will review the use of *tapeinos* presented in the Gospel. It will carefully examine how Matthew and Luke used the term for their communities. This chapter also highlights some passages that contain the term in a socio-economical sense to see how it works in their gospels.

Chapter six will try to explain how the virtue of humility came to be so popular in fourth century Christianity and how it was used as a theological-political rhetoric in response to the new context of the fourth century where the Christians began to enjoy religious freedom and political security. “This combination of joy and self-prostration is a great deal too universal to be ignored.”⁶⁴ The sayings of the desert abbas and ammas will also be examined, even though many of them are fifth-and even sixth-century ascetics, because they are a reflection of what happened in the fourth century among the ascetic monks.

⁶³ Stefan Rehl, “Demut III. Neues Testament,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller, vol. 7 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 464.

⁶⁴ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1906), 99.

The last chapter will briefly summarize the idea of humility in each context:

Hebrew Bible, Greco-Roman literature, New Testament, and the early church. However, the main focus of this chapter is to provide a new theological and historical insight for today's churches. Specifically for the churches in the United States that are closely connected and largely managed by capitalism, this chapter will ask if what they are pursuing in today's context is what the early ascetic Christians were trying to challenge.

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

CLASSIC SCHOLARS

One of the most well known books that specifically deals with the idea of humility as the primary subject in the last two millennia of church history is the work of Bernard, (1090-1153) titled *De Gradibus Humilitatis*. However, the title of the book is misleading to some extent because the book consists of two treatises. Probably the title comes from the meditations on the twelve degrees of humility, which is followed by a treatise on twelve degrees of pride.

The first part of the book obviously shows that Bernard is inspired by the seventh chapter of Benedict's *Rule*. So, it is not surprising that Bernard defines humility using the same language as Benedict: "Humility is that thorough self-examination which makes a man contemptible in his own sight."⁶⁵ To Bernard, humility leads one to the truth.⁶⁶ Knowledge of God is the end of the monk's spiritual journey; it begins with knowing oneself⁶⁷ and this is why humility is the preeminent monastic virtue. Humility is the way and the reward is the truth.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Bernard, *Steps of Humility*, 1.2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1.1.

⁶⁷ George B. Burch, "Part III: The Method of Knowledge," in *The Steps of Humility*, trans. George B. Burch (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1940), 49.

⁶⁸ Bernard, *Steps of Humility*, 1.1

Bernard derives his definition of humility from two biblical passages. The first one is from John 14:6. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The second is from Matthew 11:29. "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble in heart." Of course Bernard's conviction is supported by Matthew 11:25. "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants." According to Bernard, this passage shows the opposite side of the result of humility: the truth is hidden from the proud.⁶⁹

Burch states that Bernard and Plotinus share the same thought that "knowing thyself" is the starting point of knowing the truth. However, their motivations for that claim are different. Plotinus writes that "honoring" oneself is the beginning of knowledge.⁷⁰ Plotinus fears that his readers would underestimate themselves, believing themselves to be soulless animals unworthy of searching for truth. So, he urges them to consider that they should honor themselves as soul possessors. Bernard speaks in a different context, worrying about the other extreme. His monks never doubt that they possess souls. However, he recognizes that they are sinful beings who are apt to make all kinds of spiritual mistakes. On the other hand, he also believes that one may not reach the truth believing she or he is worse than he or she really is. Thus, the virtue of humility is to "to know yourself as you really are."

Bernard's understanding of humility is highly decorated with spiritual insights and profound metaphors. For him, thus for all the monks, humility is the way to truth and it is

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1. 2.

⁷⁰ Plotinus, *Enneades*, in *Plotinus*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, vol. 5 (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 5.1.2.

a self-examination. Although it is called “the way” to the truth, in Bernard’s understanding, humility itself produces knowledge which may differ from the original use of humilitas, ταπεινός, or ענה, whose semantic range is much wider and includes various social, economic, and political connotations.

For about five hundred years there was no major study on the virtue of humility after Bernard, even though it does not necessarily mean that the monastic traditions ceased reading, writing, and meditating about it. For example, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) wrote *The Spiritual Exercises* in Rome between 1539 and 1541.⁷¹ In paragraphs 165-167, he introduces his idea of “Three Ways of Being Humble.”⁷² His first is concerned with obedience to God’s laws: “I so lower and humble myself, as far as is in my power, that in all things I may be obedient to the law of God our Lord.”⁷³ The second way of being humble is, “It is what I have when I find myself in this disposition: When the options seem equally effective for the service of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul, I do not desire or feel myself strongly attached to have wealth rather than poverty, or honor rather than dishonor, or a long life rather than a short one.”⁷⁴ The third way moves beyond the law or service to imitation of Christ. “I desire to be regarded as a useless fool for Christ, who before me was regarded as such.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ George E. Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 117.

⁷² For better understanding of the title, see *Ibid.*, 411.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

The one who broke the long silence was Alfonso Rodríguez who wrote *A Treatise of Humility* in 1632.⁷⁶ His work deeply depends on the work of the early church fathers including Bernard, and in an academic sense the first work that adds a new perspective on the study of humility. He knows that the virtue of humility would get a negative evaluation from the Greek thinkers. According to him, the virtue of humility was not taught by the Greek philosophers. Neither Plato, nor Socrates, nor Aristotle ever did teach men this virtue. He also distinguishes the practice and teaching of the Cynics from the virtue of humility. He states, “It is true that there was a Diogenes and some others like him, who professed to contempt the world, and to despise themselves, by using mean clothes,... but even in this, they were extremely proud.”⁷⁷ However, it is obvious that his effort to point out the difference between the Greek philosophers and Christians in their understanding of humility is to point out that the virtue of humility is a unique and divine invention of the Christian church. According to him, humility was taught by “Christ our Lord.”⁷⁸

Rodríguez uses many metaphors to explain the definition and effect of humility. Particularly, he seems to enjoy the metaphor of a root to explain the spiritual value in the virtue of humility. “As the root sustains and supports the flower, and when the root is plucked up, the flower does instantly dry and wither, so every virtue whatsoever is instantly lost if it *stays* not in the root of humility.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Alfonso Rodríguez, 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

About fifty years later, William Allen wrote *A Practical Discourse of Humility* in 1681.⁸⁰ His definition of humility is, “Humility is such a lowly habit of mind, as by which men are inclined to under-value rather than to over-value themselves, and always to demean themselves according to such an estimate.”⁸¹ Generally saying, Allen and Bernard agree with each other on one point in understanding the virtue of humility: The basis of humility is that one should know his or her sinfulness.

Allen’s pitfall lies, as he recognizes, in the difficulty of explaining the danger of seeing humility as a negative mind set. One should not identify abject meanness with humility as a virtue. Abject meanness implies its impotency and feebleness, in opposition, not to pride, but to fortitude and courage. Christ is the most humble one, yet he has a great mind that is not shaken by little matters of life.⁸²

Allen sees humility and charity (love) as “twin graces.”⁸³ Humility is similar to the virtue of charity because both are “emptying” graces: Humility empties one of selfishness and charity empties one of self-love. Therefore, as seen in 1 Corinthians 13:4, “Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant.”

He is much interested in the practical side of humility as the title of the book implies. The first practical value of humility is that it works like a parent to grace.⁸⁴ It gives birth to grace: God’s grace is bestowed to those who are humble. Furthermore,

⁸⁰ Allen, *Practical Discourse of Humility*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

humility is the virtue that makes one “governable.”⁸⁵ Only the humble person who has no high conceits of him/herself is to be governed by God. Those who are proud will follow the rules of fleshly wisdom or worldly polity and reject the counsel of God as seen in Jeremiah 8:9.⁸⁶

Allen’s discourse is a great work of meditation that interweaves the passages of Scripture and the understanding of humility and its effects on human beings. However, all the biblical uses of the term “humility” are explained in a highly spiritualized manner in his writing, which is not necessarily academic and critical. For him, humility purely is a matter of soul and mind. Its nature and effect are all about the mind of a person and relationships between individuals or human beings and God. Consequently, like Bernard’s works, it lacks the critical investigation on the use of those Hebrew and Greek terms that may refer to the socio-economic aspects of humility.

In the eighteenth century, there were several important writings on the virtue of humility. The first one was John Norris’ lengthy work, *A Practical Treatise Concerning Humility: Designed for The Furtherance and Improvement of That Great Christian Vertue, Both in the Minds and Lives of Men*⁸⁷ that was published first in 1707. As Norris remarks, nobody had published any work on humility for about twenty-five years since William Allen.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁷ John Norris, *A Practical Treatise Concerning Humility: Design'd for the Furtherance and Improvement of That Great Christian Vertue, Both in the Minds and Lives of Men* (London: printed for S. Manship, 1707).

⁸⁸ Ibid., “To the Reader.”

As Bernard's work is inspired by the work of Benedict, Norris' work is deeply inspired by Allen's work and is heavily dependent on the discussions of Bernard as seen elsewhere in his writing. His definition of humility does not escape that of Allen's: "By humility is I think generally understood a low or mean opinion of ourselves, and of our own perfections and endowments, whether intellectual or moral, whether natural or acquired."⁸⁹ However, his approach to describe the nature of humility is slightly different from that of Allen: He contrasts the virtue of humility with vices such as pride and vainglory whereas Allen compares it with other virtues like charity or love.

Norris agrees with Bernard and Allen that the foundation of humility is "knowing of ourselves." Norris recognizes that the phrase is engraved over the porch of the Temple of Apollo.⁹⁰ Furthermore, as Allen does, Norris recognizes that humility is a spiritual and, more accurately, an intellectual disposition. It is about knowledge and understanding. It may have an effect on human actions, but he notices that human actions do not constitute the virtue of humility.

One of the contributions of Norris, comparing him to Bernard and Allen, is that he provides the reader with a devotional resource to meditate in a poetic style.⁹¹ Of course, in his writing, he is faithful to the long tradition of the church that has seen Jesus as the model for perfect humility. Specifically, Jesus' birth is the focal point that pronounces his humility:

"What a depth of humility was it in thee, who when thou mightest have designed a person of the highest rank and quality for the honour of being

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁹¹ Ibid., 358.

thy blessed mother, wast yet pleased to be born of a poor obscure virgin,
 espoused to a carpenter, and too poor to offer a lamb for her
 purification.”⁹²

Thirty years later, in 1737, the second major work on humility was written by Isaac Watts.⁹³ In this writing, Watts differs from the long tradition of the church that has paid primary attention to Jesus in discussion of the virtue of humility. His model now is Paul. However, the foundational understanding of humility is still the same as his predecessors. “Man should have in some measure a just idea of himself, that he may every where in his conduct and behavior maintain his own character, and answer the demands of his own station with justice and honor both in the world and in the church.”⁹⁴ For Watts, the “just idea of oneself” is identified with the “mean opinion of self,” which is one of Paul’s self-descriptions found in Ephesians 3:8, “I am the very least of all the saints.”

Watts’ writing was followed by a short work of Fénelon, the Archbishop of Cambray in 1758. It is titled *An Extract from a Discourse on Humility*.⁹⁵ In this work, instead of providing a definition of humility in a direct manner like the others before him, he uses metaphors. For him, humility is the character of Christianity, and the most evident mark of being one of God’s elect.⁹⁶ It is the source, origin and guardian of all

⁹² Ibid., 361.

⁹³ Isaac Watts, *Humility Represented in the Character of Paul: The Chief Springs of It Opened, And Its Various Advantages Display’d; Together with Some Occasional Views of the Contrary Vice* (London: Poultry, 1737).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁵ François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon, *An Extract From a Discourse on Humility: Translated From the French* (Dublin: printed for W. Watson, 1758); electronic reproduction of original from the John Rylands University Library of Manchester (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Thomson Gale, 2003).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 4.

virtues. “We shall never have any virtue, nor any degree of holiness if we are not humble.”⁹⁷ He has no doubt that humility is the remedy for pride, the worst vice of all. As pride leads one to the place to displease God, humility is what makes God happy and hear one’s prayer as seen in the story of the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector.⁹⁸

In 1791, another work was published with the title, *Humility: A Night Thought*. The author, Charles Philpot, uses the form of poetry and personifies humility to describe the value of it. However, he clearly understands the awkwardness of humility that can be translated as vice. “Oh ‘twere to do her most felonious wrong to place her by the side of coward vice.”⁹⁹

For the classic scholars, the virtue of humility is a matter of assessment of self that reflects the old saying, “know thyself.” Their understanding might lack critical investigation on the subject. However, their discussions are heavily spiritual and they try to provide lessons that are supposed to be profitable for Christians. It is amazing, however, to see that throughout centuries, they could keep such consistency in understanding the virtue of humility.

MODERN SCHOLARS

Humility was spotlighted throughout the eighteenth century while the first Great Awakening Movement among the Protestant groups was happening in the society of Britain and the American colonies. During the nineteenth century, the virtue of humility

⁹⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 8-13.

⁹⁹ Charles Philpot, *Humility: A Night Thought* (Cambridge: printed by J. Archdeacon; for J. & J. Merrill; T. Cadell, B. White & Son, G. & T. Wilkie, and J. Evans, 1791), 8.

did not get much attention from either secular scholars or Christian authors until the time of Friedrich Nietzsche. Interestingly, it was the intellectual attack of Nietzsche toward the traditional Christian ethics that provoked more serious study among the Christian scholars on the idea of humility. Nietzsche writes in a form of aphorism that humility is a false virtue which conceals the frailties and hidden crookedness in its holder. “When stepped on, a worm doubles up. That is clever. In that way he lessens the probability of being stepped on again. In the language of morality: humility.”¹⁰⁰ He believes that morality in general is an unhealthy idea because it is born out of negative values that stop all human being’s search for the better. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, thus, he writes that humility is one of the Christian values that is the most visible sign of the “slave morality.”¹⁰¹

Nietzsche hates the dependency of humanity, which is praised by Christians on the other hand. Instead, he raises “free will” to be what human beings should use, which has been considered as “pride” by Christians. In his fatally honest logic, he refused what the Church of his day was saying about humility. No wonder that many Christians sharply responded to Nietzsche’s evaluation of the virtue of humility. William Kelley is one of them. “That wild genius, Nietzsche, saved us the trouble of branding him as an immoralist by calling himself by that name (the children of this world).”¹⁰² He interprets Nietzsche’s critique of humility as a foolish effort. “Nietzsche’s topsy-turvy brain

¹⁰⁰ Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 471.

¹⁰¹ Friedrich W. Nietzsche, et al., *On the Genealogy of Morality*, in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), First Treatise, S14.

¹⁰² William Valentine Kelley, “Humility,” *Methodist Review* 90 (1908): 796.

constructed an inverted moral cosmogony, stood the universe on its head, wrenched reason and conscience and truth asunder.”¹⁰³

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Nietzsche is right in saying that the idea of humility originally was an attitude of a coward in antiquity. Nietzsche is the one who directly goes back to the literature of the Greco-Roman era, instead of listening to the teaching of the church, where ταπεινός and its cognates refer to the mindset of slaves and the poor. Thus, by simply raising questions about the validity of humility as a virtue for humankind, he actually helped historical-critical Christian thinkers take a more objective view of humility in the modern sense and the use of the language in the ancient days.

Chesterton is one of the scholars who initially responded to Nietzsche with his critical and philosophical language. He criticizes Nietzsche with a remark, “The philosopher (Nietzsche) of the ego sees everything, no doubt, from a high and rarefied heaven; only he sees everything foreshortened or deformed.”¹⁰⁴ For Chesterton, Nietzsche’s challenge simply is a matter of perspective, not a matter of truth. Chesterton defines humility as “the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are--of immeasurable stature.”¹⁰⁵ However, it is not hard to notice that his definition of humility is not really different from that of Benedict, Bernard, Allen, or

¹⁰³ Ibid., 796.

¹⁰⁴ Chesterton, *Defendant*, 135.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 142.

Norris. Thus, he positions himself among the Christian traditionalist at least in understanding the virtue of humility.

Biblical scholarship finally showed its interest in the idea of humility in the middle of the twentieth century; Stefan Rehr became one of the first biblical scholars who challenged the traditional understanding of humility based on his extensive Greek study. In his long article titled “Das Problem Der Demut in Der Profan-Griechisch Literature: Im Vergleich Zu Septuaginta Und Neuem Testament,” he begins his discussion with a leading question, “Is humility really unknown to the Greeks?” His focal point is on the Greek term *tapeinos*, which is used in Phil. 2:3 for Jesus’ incarnation. His answer to the leading question is rather a simple one: The Greeks would not have understood the term and the meaning of humility as a virtue.¹⁰⁶

The Greeks and Christians shared the same word *tapeinos* and it is probable that they used it to refer to the same thing in their everyday life context. However, to the Greeks, *tapeinos* had no chance to be viewed as a virtue whereas Christians rated it as a virtue.¹⁰⁷ It was a vice to most Greeks while to the Christians, humility means “self moderation.”¹⁰⁸ This discrepancy between the two groups in understanding and use of the same word constitutes a problem to discuss.

One of the earliest works that seriously took the issue of the virtue of humility in the Hebrew Bible was done by the French scholar Robert Martin-Achard in 1965. The contribution he makes through his relatively short article is that he initiates further

¹⁰⁶ Stefan Rehr, *Das Problem Der Demut in Der Profan-Griechischen Literatur: Im Vergleich Zu Septuaginta Und Neuem Testament* (Aschendorff Münster, 1961), 7-9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 21.

academic investigation into the concept of the Hebrew root ענה that is the most often used word for humble/humility in the Hebrew Bible. In his article “Yahwé et les ‘anāwīm,” Martin-Achard focuses on the theological and historical importance of the social group called ‘anāwīm (the poor).¹⁰⁹ In the Hebrew Bible, the plural form ‘anāwīm is always related to the justice of God. God is the one who hears the voice of the poor in more of a “*juridico-religieux*” context in which they live and reproaches the enemy of the poor. Thus, Martin-Achard strongly argues that there is a special closeness between God and the poor, the term from ענה which is often used to refer to humble/humility.¹¹⁰ By his study, Martin-Achard started a long debate about the definition and the use of ענה in the Hebrew Bible and Judaism, a debate that lasted more than forty years.

German-speaking scholar Ragnar Leivestad was one of the few scholars in the 1960s who wrote articles concerning the Greek term *tapeinos*.¹¹¹ He notices that the word *tapeinos* might have a totally different meaning in the biblical linguistic usage than the understanding of the everyday life of the ancient people. “While it designates a lack and a vice in the other literature, it becomes in the LXX and in the New Testament a virtue.”¹¹² Thus, his purpose of the study is to find out the linguistic and philosophical connection between two totally different uses of the same word and the point of divorce between the two.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Martin-Achard, “Yahwé et les ‘anāwīm,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965): 349-357.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹¹¹ Ragnar Leivestad, “Tapeinos-Tapeinophron,” *Novum Testamentum* 8, no. 1 (1966): 36-47.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 36.

His contribution to the study of humility in the New Testament is huge, specifically in providing a new perspective on Matthew 11:29. In analyzing ταπεινός, he opens up a new way to view Jesus' self-description: "I am humble in heart." This has traditionally been viewed as a model case of humility since it is directly shown by Jesus. However, Leivestad thinks that it might be a negative expression for Jesus himself regarding his low social status. In the preponderance of uses in secular Greek, ταπεινός refers to a person who is base, ignoble, of low birth, working at a humble occupation, or held in low esteem.¹¹³ Even though it was thought to be a virtue elsewhere in the New Testament, in the biblical tradition, ταπεινός still refers to one who is lowly. Considering the context of the passage where Jesus calls people with weariness and burdens, which is the very life style of the *tapeinos*; by using the same description for himself, Jesus invites others to his teaching. This reminds one that there is a huge turnover: God reveals salvation to "those of low degree," not to the mighty (Luke 1:52). Matthew's Jesus calls the "weary and burdened" to come to him for rest.

Ronald Green writes about the virtue of humility in a perspective of Jewish ethics in 1973. His presupposition about the ethic of Judaism is that it is an ethic of duty.¹¹⁴ There is Torah and the Jewish ethic is a simple request of doing what the Law asks. All the Talmudic virtues are derived either directly or through the hermeneutic rules from the standard established by the Torah.¹¹⁵ Then, he asks himself if there is any

¹¹³ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁴ Ronald Green, "Jewish Ethics and the Virtue of Humility," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 1 (1973): 53.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

excellences of character that are held important in conducing to and furnishing the dispositional ground for morality. His answer is humility.

Humility in the eyes of Jewish piety is to recognize one's subordinate position before God and the Law.¹¹⁶ It is the right attitude of the righteous in the relationship with God and it is an attitude held necessary to orient the self in all moral relations.¹¹⁷ When the relationship between humankind and God is disrupted, it is humility that brings reconciliation to the relationship. Therefore, humility is a genuine constitutive virtue for Jewish ethical thought.

A systematic problem still remains in Green's discussion. Torah may demand obedience in humility but the concept of humble/humility as a virtue is not an important issue in the Torah at all. For example, the most often used Hebrew root ענה for humble/humility in English is not seen as a virtue in the Torah.¹¹⁸ It always refers to human suffering or humiliation by force. Moreover, Green's attempt to show that humility of the Hebrew Bible is congruent with what turns out to be a particularly modern understanding of moral reason is questionable because his understanding of humility is not of the Hebrew Bible, after all, but of the rabbinic teachings of Midrash and Talmud.

Sol Roth, a Jewish scholar, recognizes that Judaism requires humility on both religious and human grounds.¹¹⁹ He understands humility in two ways. First, humility is a

¹¹⁶ Obviously, this reminds one of the definition of humility in the writings of Benedict, Bernard, or Allen, etc. However, it lacks the sense of being humble before people.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹¹⁸ Numbers 12:3 is an exceptional case to many commentators. It might provide a model of true humility through a picture of Moses. However, this is disputable. This dissertation will discuss it in the third chapter.

¹¹⁹ Sol Roth, "Towards a Definition of Humility," *Tradition* 13, no. 4 (1973): 5-22.

function of two things: attainments and attitudes. His logic is simple. To be outstanding in humility, one must first be outstanding in achievements because humility is an attitude of the successful. Second, the sense of humility is not the same as the psychological sense of inferiority. A humble person recognizes the successes he has achieved; he is even aware of their value; he simply avoids attaching great importance to himself because of these successes.¹²⁰

Sol Roth's contribution to the study of humility is his unique analysis of the difference between the *'anah* and the *shefal ruach*. According to him, the *'anah* is grateful and accepts the idea of equality. The *shefal ruach* goes beyond the *'anah* by insisting on one's own insignificance and weakness in relation to others.¹²¹ Therefore, his definition of humility is that of *shefal ruach*.

Although Sol Roth refers to the Hebrew Bible to support his point, just like Green, much of his understanding of humility obviously comes from the Rabbinic literature, which is a production of the fourth century and after. Since his knowledge is not directly from the historical-critical study of the Bible but from secondary sources, which he generally accepts, it is not certain if his understanding and definition of humility can truly represent the idea of humility in the Bible.

As a female liberation theologian, Elsa Tamez finds more negative sense from the root ענה.¹²² She sees the word *'anah* as a description of the relationship between the oppressor and oppressed. *'anah* means not only "to oppress" but also "to make someone

¹²⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹²¹ Ibid., 11.

¹²² Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1982).

feel dependent,” which implies the unhealthy relationship between the powerful and the powerless. When this happens, the relationship always is accompanied by human degradation and humiliation. In this, her understanding is very similar to that of Nietzsche.

Tamez does not feel that ‘*anah*’ refers to a virtue. Her logic is based on her assumption that the oppressed never voluntarily humble themselves before the oppressor. The oppressor (the proud) actively oppress, exploit, and humiliate. The oppressed do not humble themselves before the oppressor. They are simply humbled by and before the power of the oppressor. This understanding, thus, does not shed light on the possible understanding of humility as a virtue in a traditional way. Even when the oppressor is in a relationship with God, the most powerful, one cannot expect humility as a voluntary virtue from the oppressor. The disposition that the oppressor might show to God is a result of “being oppressed” by the higher power.¹²³ Upon these understandings, Tamez quickly concludes that God may oppress the oppressors in order to secure equity and justice for the oppressed.

Klaus Wengst’s book *Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated* is a unique work in two senses. First, he traces the historical and theological development of the idea of humility and its social meaning in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian tradition.¹²⁴ Second, he tries to prove that humility as a virtue in the Bible and the early Christian tradition should be understood as an initiation of one’s entering the community of God.

¹²³ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁴ Wengst, *Humility*.

In Greco-Roman culture, Wengst points out, humility was never a virtue. It was understood negatively and mostly seen as characteristic of a low social position and the lowly disposition of insignificant people. Humility as a virtue is alien to the whole of ancient ethics.¹²⁵ However, there is a positive use of the term in the Greco-Roman literature when it is meant to describe the deliberate modesty of a life-style free from conceit and the quest for fame, as seen in a passage of Plutarch.¹²⁶

In the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition, humility characterizes the status of the lowly. However, Wengst states, there is a critical difference between the Greco-Roman and Hebrew Bible-Jewish tradition. "Whereas in the Greek and Latin texts ordinary people are looked down on from above, the Old Testament texts speak from the perspective of these insignificant people and take the side of those who are exposed to being downtrodden and to humiliation."¹²⁷ He argues that in the humiliation experienced by the poor, there grew a sense of solidarity, and in this alternative society, strangely, an ethic of non-violence and mutuality appeared.¹²⁸ This is, according to him, how poverty also takes on an ethical dimension although it still is seen as humiliation. Wengst, however, is careful in saying that the understanding of humility in the Torah and Prophets is somewhat different from that of the Writings. In his view, the Wisdom tradition divorces itself from the social context of the Torah and Prophets and creates a new idea

¹²⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 16-30.

that the wealthy can walk humbly with God also. In this case humility is seen as the “modesty of the better-off.”¹²⁹

In the early Christian tradition, humility becomes God’s solidarity with the humiliated. By self-abasement, one enters into the solidarity of the lowly and humiliated, which has the result of exaltation as in the case of the Magnificat of Mary. Humility in Paul’s view is the condition of the new community: “In humility count others better than yourselves.” Thus, Paul demonstrates his own humility in solidarity with God’s people, the insignificant and lowly.

By the time of Clement, Wengst says, humility had evolved into submission to an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and was no longer a condition of community solidarity. What the church promoted was a political distortion of the original idea of humility to effectively control the Christians under the authority of bishops. However, it is this understanding of humility that has had the most powerful effect in church history. Humility is not such a virtue of subjects, but denotes the solidarity of the humiliated.

Throughout the book, it seems to be obvious that Wengst tries to offer encouragement to Latin American liberation theology and black theology, as he states elsewhere.¹³⁰ Being poor is not all negative if one seriously takes the theology of the Hebrew Bible. Rather, it might be a positive human experience since it is a way to get attention and support from God. Through the rhetoric of humility, the Hebrew Bible teaches that God always stands on the side of the poor, the underprivileged, and the oppressed.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 58.

As a New Testament scholar, Wengst received an immediate response from Stephen B. Dawes, a professor of the Hebrew Bible at Queen's College in Birmingham.¹³¹ In his short article, "Humility: Whence This Strange Notion?" he strongly argues that Wengst's "solidarity of the oppressed" is not what the Hebrew Bible means by humility, while readily agreeing with the view that humility as a virtue has its origins in the Hebrew Bible. His criticism is against two "mistakes" Wengst makes: Over-generalization of the relationship between the notion of humility and the poor as a social group and his dependency of dating to come up with such an idea that humility is a product of the experience of the people in the eighth century BCE.

Not surprisingly, his argument is based on the analysis of the Hebrew term 'anāwāh that appears six times in the Hebrew Bible (Zeph. 2:3; Prov. 15:33; 18:12; 22:4; Psalms 18:36; 45:5). In those passages he does not see much difficulty in translating or understanding the term in the context. Even though the Royal Psalms (18:36 and 45:5) may be problematic, the use of 'anāwāh makes sense. The problem of Wengst is that in those passages using 'anāwāh, Zeph. 2:3 is the only one that shows any kind of association with humiliation where the "afflicted of the land" are urged to "seek righteousness and humility." Dawes' criticism is that Wengst too quickly takes this association between the social group and the virtue of humility to generalize the idea of humility to mean the solidarity of the humiliated.¹³²

¹³¹ Stephen B. Dawes, "Humility: Whence This Strange Notion?," *The Expository Times* 103 (1991): 72-75.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 72.

The second criticism Dawes raises against Wengst is about dating of the word “*nāwāh*” in trying to figure out the origin of the idea of humility in the Hebrew Bible. Wengst’s argument is based on his assumption that the notion of humility is the product of the eighth century BCE to be linked with the “poor.” However, there are not many biblical scholars who can be sure about the date of the Bible. Scholars should look for better clues elsewhere.¹³³

Dawes’ argument is strong, but not without some blemish. First, he states that the “humility vocabulary” in the Hebrew Bible is rather sparse.¹³⁴ This statement might not be wrong but is certainly misleading. Although one can see the “humility vocabulary” in many places in the Hebrew Bible and in the English translations, it is not true that the occurrences of the vocabulary of humility are even throughout the books of the Hebrew Bible. The “humility vocabulary,” as well as “honor vocabulary,” occurs more in the Writings and Prophets than in the Torah and the Deuteronomic History combined.¹³⁵ Specifically, in the NRSV, the Hebrew terms translated as either humility or humble occur five times more in the Writings than in the Torah. In the case of the root *ענה*, which both Wengst and Dawes are interested in, it is hard to observe that the Torah uses it to mean any form of virtue. This can indicate that it might not be the Torah that established the idea of humility as a virtue in Jewish society. Furthermore, if the Christian notion of humility is seen to come out of the Hebrew Bible, probably it is due to the notion of humility in the Writings and Prophets, not the Torah.

¹³³ Ibid., 74.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹³⁵ Chapter three will show this.

Second, Dawes assumes that the traditional understanding of Moses as the most humble person on earth (Num. 12:3) is the correct reading. His logic is supported by the translation of the Septuagint where the word “humble” is translated as “πρᾶϋς” which refers to the classic meaning of “to be humble.” However, it should be noted that, as he is aware of,¹³⁶ the translation is still debatable. Furthermore, many commentators would agree that the verse itself is a later addition by the editors.¹³⁷ This means the verse could be a statement reflecting the philosophy of the editors, not the original writers of Torah. The translation of the Septuagint cannot support the view that Moses is the most humble either, because it is a product of the people who were living in the Jewish society where humility was firmly established to be a virtue.

In 1991, *Vetus Testamentum* 41 contains an important work concerning the virtue of humility in the Jewish understanding.¹³⁸ Dawes again argues that the meaning of humility in modern terminology makes sense for the six occurrences of ‘anāwāh in the Hebrew Bible. From a rather close examination of the use of ‘anāwāh in Ben Sira and the Qumran literature, he draws the conclusion that ‘anāwāh as a virtue is not a strange idea to both communities. Ben Sira recognizes that humility is a virtue which the wise man will seek to cultivate. It is an awareness of one’s intellectual limits and a refusal to challenge the authority of God. It is an important and significant virtue, a sign of strength

¹³⁶ Ibid., 74. He remarks in the endnote that scholars like Coats would argue that the meaning of ‘anāwāh in Num. 12:3 might be from the verb meaning “to answer.”

¹³⁷ Stephen B. Dawes, “Numbers 12.3: What Was Special About Moses?”, *The Bible Translator* 41, no. 3 (July 1990): 336. Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, vol. 4 in *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 95.

¹³⁸ Stephen B. Dawes, “Anāwāh in Translation and Tradition,” *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 1 (1991): 38-48.

of character and a positive force in the wise man's life.¹³⁹ In the Rule of the Qumran community, the general sense of 'anāwāh as humility as a virtue is clear and it receives positive evaluation.¹⁴⁰

Having observed the sense of 'anāwāh in Ben Sira and the Rule of the Qumran community that are nearest in time to the Hebrew Bible, Dawes continues to examine six occurrences of 'anāwāh in the Hebrew Bible. In Zeph. 2:3, 'anāwāh is juxtaposed and paralleled with righteousness and the author beseeches the audience, "Seek!" In this passage, there can be little doubt that 'anāwāh, whatever it may mean, is used to mean a kind of virtue like righteousness. In all three of the occurrences of 'anāwāh in Proverbs (15:33; 18:12; 22:4), it is seen as leading to social status and recognition (*kabod*). What makes 'anāwāh look like a kind of virtue, hopefully to mean humility, is that the term often is compared elsewhere in Proverbs with the idea of arrogance, which is the antithesis of humility in the Jewish tradition.

Psalm 18:36 seems not as easy as the passages above in translation and pointing out the meaning of humility from the word 'anāwāh. Many commentators regard the literal translation of the Masoretic text, "and your humility has made me great," as dubious if not impossible.¹⁴¹ However, as many Midrash texts may imply that God might have humility, it is not totally impossible to translate 'anāwāh in 18:36 as God's humility. According to Dawes, humility is something that seeks and promotes the welfare of the

¹³⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴¹ NRSV, "your help"; KJV, "thy gentleness"; NIV, "you stoop down."

other, especially of the one in need, without regard for one's own image. Therefore, humility would be the strongest candidate to translate 'anāwāh in the context.

Psalm 45:4 (5) is another difficult text to sense the idea of humility from 'anāwāh. עֲנָוָה וְיִשְׁתַּדְּלֶךָ is translated in NIV as "humility and righteousness," in KJV, "meekness and righteousness," and in NRSV, "to defend the right." Dawes argues that in the Masoretic text at least, humility is a virtue which is associated here with the king.¹⁴² Since the king is warned against pride elsewhere in the Bible, it is not totally impossible to translate 'anāwāh as the humility of a king.

What Dawes tries to prove in his article is that the virtue of humility is well attested in the Hebrew Bible and carried by the whole Jewish tradition. Although the root of 'anāwāh may mean "affliction, suffering, or poor," the use of 'anāwāh in the six passages clearly shows that humility was a firmly settled virtue of the Hebrew Bible even though it is associated with human suffering.

While Hebrew Bible scholars have actively been exchanging their thoughts and theories about humility in the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic tradition, mostly focusing on the literary analysis of the root עָנָה, and New Testament scholars have been relatively silent on the subject, Downing gives a new perspective to the study of humility as a virtue. He argues that ancient Cynicism has some connection with the origin of Christianity, specifically on the early Christian piety. The purpose of his study is seen at the end of his book, "I hope that I have at least given grounds for accepting that from very early days Christianity looked like a variant of a popular and pervasive--and varied--

¹⁴² Dawes, "Anāwāh in Translation and Tradition," 47.

Cynicism, and that this Cynic strand went on being obvious and entirely acceptable to informed Christian writers in the early centuries, even when they could also be very critical of the more radical Cynic tradition, and were in competition with its continuing adherents.”¹⁴³

Downing’s work is continued by William D. Desmond in 2006. As a specialist in classics, he provides a fresh angle to see the ethical complexity of poverty.¹⁴⁴ The Cynics, like Diogenes, shared many visible traits with the ascetic monks. Most of all, they praised poverty. Through a comprehensive analysis of wealth and poverty in classical Greek thought, Desmond points out two concurrent themes. The first illuminates the Greek understanding of the virtue of humility, running mainly from Hesiod to Aristotle. The second illuminates this understanding’s continuation in Diogenes and Cynical thought in general. It seems that Desmond’s goal is to read the Cynic thoughts on poverty as part of the classical tradition, which in turn influenced Christianity. He argues, “The ideas of the ancient Cynics have been modified in varieties of Stoicism, Christianity, and Postmodernism.”¹⁴⁵

There have been few church historians who expressed their opinions on the virtue of humility. Roberta Bondi is one of them. Bondi’s understanding of humility in the monastic orders undeniably is in the long line of the Benedictine notion of humility¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Francis G. Downing, *Cynics and Christian Origins* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 302.

¹⁴⁴ William D. Desmond, *The Greek Praise of Poverty : Origins of Ancient Cynicism* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 174

¹⁴⁶ Bondi, “Humility: A Meditation on An Ancient Virtue for Modern Christians,” *Quarterly Review* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 27. It should be noted that her study is limited to the monastic tradition based on many passages from the *Sayings* and the sayings of Dorotheos of Gaza in the 6th century as supporting witness to her point.

which is carried by the medieval church monastic groups and leaders like St. Bernard.

For her, the virtue of humility is more of a spiritual-psychological defense system for the monks who put tremendous effort into pursuing Christian perfection. In their monastic life style, the monks were constantly asked to find out their own faults, mistakes, and ignorance that could create a huge gap between their reality and the goal. They tried hard. But what they had to realize every day was how far they were from their ideal image of a Christian as they “fell.” It could create spiritual and psychological frustration and depression. Eventually, this could lead the monks to an end of what they were doing. The real mistakes any monk can make are to deny God’s power of forgiveness and grace that would let the monk bounce back from the depth of committing sins and resume his quest for perfection. The virtue of humility represents this whole cycle of human shortcomings and God’s graceful reaction.

Burton-Christie agrees with Bondi in general, thus standing on the side of Benedict and Bernard. For him, the humility of the monks was seeing the real image of themselves: Consciousness of sin and dependence upon God.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, for the monks, cultivating the virtue of humility had a double purpose. The first one was to have an honest assessment of one’s endless capacity for guile and self-deceit. Second, the monks were asked to move in the direction of recognizing that they were incapable of doing anything good. They needed “the mercy of God—and of others.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Burton-Christie, 238.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 238.

The benefit of humility, for Burton-Christie, is mainly therapeutic: the virtue of humility is to give spiritual peace to monks. From knowing oneself in a right way, how sinful one can be, a monk can develop the capacity to give himself/herself over in a spirit of trust to the source of their salvation. “Humility...refers to a deep confidence in the goodness of God which is symbolized by a silent, abiding trust”¹⁴⁹ as abba Poemen says, “Let go of a small part of your righteousness, and in a few days you will be at rest.”¹⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

In most cases, scholars seem to play safe in their discussions on the idea of humility. The classic scholars in the early centuries pay more attention to the spiritual sense of humility while lacking critical investigation of church history and biblical literature. Their concern is more of pastoral care based on their understanding of humility. They never present any idea that might look challenging to the old teachings of the Church. On the other hand, modern scholars analyze the subject and present their ideas within the area they find most comfortable. However, by doing so, they unavoidably provide the reader narrow views on the idea of humility within their limit. This calls for a new approach to the idea of humility since the idea of humility is not an isolated idea for one specific historical moment but an idea that has survived throughout centuries, even though it might refer to different things according to different contexts. Wengst responds to this necessity. He spreads his attention to various areas including the Hebrew Bible, Greco-Roman culture, the New Testament, and the early church. As a result of the study, he filters out a

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 239.

¹⁵⁰ *Sayings*, 178.

theological idea that humility refers to a social group that is supported by God in the Bible. However, although his study offers a fresh view on the idea, he seems to fail to be fair because his entire discussion is saturated by his liberation theology. His conclusion does not seem to come out of what he observes from the Bible and history. Rather, he deliberately and forcefully uses his liberation theology to change what the Bible and history seem to say.

HUMILITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

The authority of the Hebrew Bible and its influence on the writers of the New Testament and the formation of the early Church theology are undoubtedly great. The Gospels, specifically Matthew and Luke, try to present Jesus as the one that the Hebrew Bible has foretold for a long time. It is not surprising, thus, that they keep referring to the passages of the Hebrew Bible as they unfold the stories of Jesus to remind the audience of how one can see the connection between Jesus and the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. A Pauline letter does not hesitate to say to Timothy that the Bible (Hebrew Bible) is inspired by God and needed for every aspect of Christian conduct (2 Tim. 3:16). The Hebrew Bible might have nothing to do with the New Testament, but the New Testament owes a lot to the Hebrew Bible.

Early Christian leaders also knew the importance of the Hebrew Bible for the life of the Church. Even though most of the New Testament was written before the second century CE, they were not yet elevated to the special status of canonical Scripture, like the Hebrew Bible for Jews. Thus, when Christian writers like Clement of Rome,¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Let this scripture be far from us where he says, “Wretched are the double-minded, those who doubt in their soul and say, ‘We heard these things even in the days of our fathers, and look, we have grown old, and none of these things have happened to us’ (1 *Clement* 23:3).

Barnabas,¹⁵² and Justin¹⁵³ referred to Scripture in defense of the Christian doctrine, they exclusively meant the Hebrew Bible.

Can one apply the same principle to the virtue of humility as a Christian virtue? The initial answer is “yes.” As seen in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:6, the concept of Christian humility appears to be indebted to the teaching of the Hebrew Bible. Then one should ask another question: From what part of the Hebrew Bible does the theology of humility as a virtue come? In Matthew 7:12, Jesus divides the Hebrew Bible into two categories: the Law and the Prophets. According to Matthew, the so-called “Golden Rule”¹⁵⁴ is what the Law and Prophets teach. Is this similar to the idea of humility as a virtue in the New Testament and Christian theology? How far can one trace back in the Hebrew Bible to find the origin of it? Does the Law teach about humility as a virtue? If so, one can certainly assume that humility is a Jewish virtue and there is a little room for Christian ingenuity. If not so, what does it mean?

This chapter investigates the semantic range of the Hebrew words for “humble/humility” occurring in the Hebrew Bible. This study is necessary to rightly capture the

¹⁵² For the Scripture says: “And Moses was on the mountain fasting for forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of the hand of the Lord” (*Barnabas* 4:7).; For the Scripture says: “Woe to those who are wise in their own opinion, and clever in their own eyes” (*Barnabas* 4:11).; For the Scripture concerning him relates partly to Israel and partly to us, and speaks as follows: “He was wounded because of our transgressions, and has been afflicted because of our sins; by his wounds we were healed. Like a sheep he was led to slaughter, and like a lamb he was silent before his shearer” (*Barnabas* 5:2).; For the Scripture speaks about us when he says to the Son: “Let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let them rule over the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea” (*Barnabas* 6:12)., etc.

¹⁵³ Thus, for instance, they have taught you that this Scripture which we are now discussing refers to Hezekiah, in which, as I promised, I shall show they are wrong. And since they are compelled, they agree that some Scriptures which we mention to them, and which expressly prove that Christ was to suffer, to be worshipped, and [to be called] God, and which I have already recited to you, do refer indeed to Christ, but they venture to assert that this man is not Christ. See Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 68.

¹⁵⁴ “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you” (NRSV).

general idea of humble/humility in Hebrew language not only as a description of one's spiritual position or human condition but also as a rhetoric. It also provides one a place to investigate the origin of the idea of humility as a virtue for the early Christians since the Hebrew Bible is believed to have huge influence to the formation of Christian theology. This investigation will be compared with and reflected upon the semantic range of the Hebrew terms for "glory/honor" so that one can see the meaning of "humble/humility" with a better philological clarity. However, another goal of this chapter is to show that Torah and the Deuteronomistic history have little to do with the formation of the theology of "humble/humility" as a virtue not only for the Jewish people but also for Christians.

SEMANTIC RANGE OF HUMBLE/HUMILITY LANGUAGE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Unlike the Greek New Testament that uses only *tapeinos* and *praus* and their cognates to refer to the idea of humble/humility, the Hebrew Bible provides various words that may refer to humble/humility in English. According to the NRSV, the English vocabulary "humble, humbled, humblest, humbly, humiliate, humiliated, humiliation, and humility" appear sixty-three times in the Hebrew Bible. The corresponding Hebrew words to them are: ענה (28 times), כנע (18 times), שפל (7 times), שחח (4 times), צנע (2 times), כלמ (2 times), בכה (1 time), צעיר (1 time), and עוב (1 time).

1. ענה

In the Hebrew Bible, the most commonly used Hebrew root for the English word

“humble” and its synonyms is ענה, although there are four homonyms recognized by most lexicons concerning which many scholars find problems in translation.¹⁵⁵ Among those homonyms, ענה II is the word generally translated to show the sense of the noun “humility” or the adjective “humble” in English.

The root ‘nh with the sense of any state of “humility” or “affliction” is common in various Semitic languages. According to H. Donner and W. Röllig, ‘nh in Phoenician in the piel form found in the inscription from Karatepe seems to mean “to oppress, subjugate.”¹⁵⁶ In Moabite, the same ‘nh in the piel means “to press hard.”¹⁵⁷ In the old Aramaic, it may mean “lowly, humble, or submissive” although the meaning is not clear.¹⁵⁸ In Imperial Aramaic, ‘nwh means “humiliation.”¹⁵⁹ In old South Arabic, ‘nw is to be “humble, submissive.”¹⁶⁰

The verb ענה II occurs six times in the qal in the Hebrew Bible. It refers to the near-death affliction (Psalm 116:10), the hardship used by God to drive the psalmist back to God’s word (Psalm 119:67), or the oppression of wicked leaders (Zechriah 10:2). In the nifal, it appears to mean reflexively “to humble oneself” (Exodus 10:3) or passively

¹⁵⁵ Francis Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the OT: Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius*, ed. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, trans. Edward Robinson (Lafayette, Ind: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981), 772-773. Psalm 55:19, עֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים is translated as “humble” or “afflict” in many translations while NASB translates it as “answer.” Among those homonyms, ענה II is the word generally translated to show the sense of the noun “humility” or the adjective “humble” in English.

¹⁵⁶ H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* (Otto Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1964), 41.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 172.

¹⁵⁸ Charles-F. Jean and Jacob Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des Inscriptions Sémitiques de L'ouest* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 218.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 218.

¹⁶⁰ R. Martin-Achard, “ענה ‘nh II to be destitute,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 931. Henceforth, *TLOT*.

“to be bowed down or to be oppressed.” As the hiphil, it is causative, “to humble.”¹⁶¹

Most commonly, ענה II is used with the piel and pual stems usually to deliver unlawful/immoral meanings in the culture of the Hebrew Bible. In five occasions, it is used for “sexual intercourse.” When Shechem saw Dinah, he seized her and lay with her by force (Genesis 34:2). In Deuteronomy 22:23, it is used for consensual adultery that results in the death penalty. In 2 Samuel 13:14, Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. Judges 20:15 also uses ענה II to explain what happened between a concubine of a Levite and a group of Benjaminites at Gibeah. They “raped” her all night and she became non-responsive at last to the Levite. Lamentation 5:11 also uses ענה II for “rape.” “Women are raped in Zion, virgins in the towns of Judah” (NRSV).

In other cases, ענה II is used for mental or physical abuse which may not necessarily be sexual as seen in Genesis 16:6, “Sarah treated Hagar harshly.”¹⁶² In Genesis 31:50, Laban asks Jacob not to ענה his daughters. Since Jacob is already married to them, the word ענה is translated as “ill-treat” (NRSV), “mistreat” (NIV), or “afflict” (KJV, ESV, ASV) instead of “rape.” Another example of this use is found in Exodus 22:22. “You shall not *abuse* any widow or orphan.”

ענה II can mean various sorts of ascetic practices. In this, translators have differing ideas of the word. The expression in Leviticus 16:29 (cf. Numbers 29:7) אֶת-נַפְשְׁהֵיכֶם is translated “shall afflict your soul (KJV and ASV),” “shall deny

¹⁶¹ Paul Wegner, “ענה II”, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 449. Henceforth, *NIDOTTE*. Georg Fohrer, ed. *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. W. Johnstone (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), 208. Henceforth, *HADOT*.

¹⁶² NRSV, RSV, TNK, and NAS.

yourselves (NRSV),” or “must deny yourselves (NIV)” while New American Standard translates it “shall humble your souls.” Since the context of this verse is Yom Kippur, Wright claims that “afflicting (denying) souls” mainly denotes fasting or abstention from other physical pleasures such as anointing and sexual intercourse.¹⁶³

Martin-Achard pays extensive attention to the comparison between עני and ענוה. Usually, the former is translated “poor” while the latter “humble.” However, he states, “Scholars are not more inclined to equate the two expressions and to see ענוה as a dialectal variant or perhaps a late Aramaizing by-form of עני.”¹⁶⁴ Sokoloff’s observation reflects this opinion. He draws two meanings from the same root ענה without any question: one is of poorness and the other is of affliction.¹⁶⁵ By French and German speaking scholars, it has been suggested however that the difference between עני and ענוה may indicate that there was a semantic development from the original profane meaning of “poor” to the post exilic meaning of “humble, pious.” Thus, the concept of poverty has been spiritualized under prophetic influence.¹⁶⁶

In terms of social status, it is undeniable that עני is associated with those who do not have full rights in Israel, including the stranger (Leviticus 19:10; Ezekiel 22:29; Zechriah 7:10, etc.), the orphan (Isaiah 10:2; Zechriah 7:10; Job 24:9, etc.), the widow, and also with the hungry, homeless, naked (Isaiah 58:7), the oppressed, and the helpless. According to a poetic expression of Isaiah, they are “broken in spirit” (Isaiah 66:2). The

¹⁶³ David P. Wright, “Day of Atonement,” *ABD*, 72-76.

¹⁶⁴ R. Martin-Achard, *TLOT* 2: 931-937.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2002), 871-872.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 872.

victim of social oppression is surely included (Isaiah 3:15, Psalm 35:10, Habbakuk 3:14, etc.).

On the other hand, according to D. Winton Thomas, to an extent, עני can mean, “bound in captivity or imprisoned.”¹⁶⁷ Concerning the case of Psalm 105:18, he states, “The traditional translation of עני as ‘affliction’ hardly provides a suitable meaning with ‘feet’ as an object. The smoother translation would be “they imprisoned his feet in fetters.”” To support his point of “pairing feet with imprisonment,” he raises an example of Psalm 105:18. This phrase shows that neck and collar can be paired up naturally. The meaning ‘captivity, imprisonment’ for עני may be seen in Job 36:8 and Psalm 107:10 also.

עניינם may basically mean what עני already connotes. The social status of עניינם is that their rights are violated (Amos 2:7). But there is hope. עניינם is not just the poor people without any power. They are promised a divine deliverance. The LORD is to deliver them (Psalms 76:10). The LORD has mercy on them (Isaiah 49:13), hears their cries (Job 34:28), heeds them (Isaiah 41:17), does not forget them (Psalm 74:19), and does not conceal his face from them (Psalm 22:25). The LORD is the God of the עניינם.¹⁶⁸ God becomes the oppressor to the oppressors so that they become humiliated before the world.¹⁶⁹ Thus, later in the post-canonical literature, the word poverty tends to come with a religious connotation.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ D. Winton Thomas, “Hebrew עני ‘Captivity’”, *The Journal of Theological Studies: New Series* 16 (1965): 444-445.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Martin-Achard, “Yahwé et les ‘anāwīm,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965): 349-357.

¹⁶⁹ Elsa Tamez, 12.

¹⁷⁰ Johann Maier, *Die Texte Vom Toten Meer*, vol. 2 (Germany: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag München, 1960), 83-87.

It is notable that in Torah, ענה is almost evenly used to mean “to be afflicted or humiliated”; that is far from a virtue (Gen. 15:13; 16:6, 9; 31:50; 34:2; Ex. 1:11-12; 10:3; 22:21-22; Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32; Num. 24:24; 29:7; 30:14; Deut. 8:2-3, 16; 21:14; 22:24, 29; 26:6). It is similar to the Deuteronomistic history (Judg. 16:5-6, 19; 19:24; 20:5; 2 Sam. 7:10; 13:12, 14, 22, 32; 1 Kings 2:26; 8:35; 11:39; 2 Kings 17:20; Is 25:5; 31:4; 53:4, 7; 58:3, 5, 10; 60:14; 64:11). However in the Chronistic history, which is known to be later writings than the Deuteronomistic history, ענה is found only in two places to mean “to be afflicted or humbled” (Ezra 8:21; 2 Chr. 6:26). Rather, it appears to be closely related to the idea of virtue.

2. כנע

The root of this verb occurs thirty-six times in the Hebrew Bible. It is usually translated in the NRSV as either “humbled” (18 times) or “subdued” (14 times). Other cases include “brought into subjection” (Psalm 106:42), “bowed down” (Psalm 107:12), and “bring them low” (Job 40:12 and 2 Chronicles 28:19). Many lexicons observe that this verb often refers to humiliation imposed by force of either God or military power. Eighteen of the instances refer to submission imposed by military victory. Fifteen instances relate to the action of a king in submission of himself and Israel to God.¹⁷¹ Some lexicons recognize *kena* ‘ as its Aramaic derivative to mean “humble” while *kana* ‘a in Arabic as another possible derivative which means “to be contracted, wrinkled, or to fold wings.”¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ William J. Dumbrell, “כנע,” *NIDOTTE* 2: 667.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 667; *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 488.

The use of כנע in the Deuteronomistic history is again undeniably different from that of the Chronicler's history just as in the case of ענה. Among ten occurrences of כנע in the Deuteronomistic history, seven of them involve the defeat and subjection of Israel's foe. Out of thirty-six total occurrences, the verb כנע appears in Judges four times. In all cases, Israel's enemies are "subdued." Only three occurrences refer to the leaders of Israel: the humbleness of Ahab two times and of Josiah one time. When the Deuteronomistic history describes the enemy of Israel, military power and battle are preconditions of the situation and the meanings that כנע deliver are always political. On the other hand, when this verb is used for the attitude of the kings, there is no military action involved. Although it can always be interpreted as "a political ploy" by the skeptics, the Deuteronomistic history obviously tries to use כנע as a spiritual posture of the kings who repent of their sins.

כנע is most heavily used in first (three times) and second Chronicles (sixteen times) which is noteworthy for further discussion.¹⁷³ In 1 Chronicles, כנע always describes the political humiliation of Israel's foe. On the other hand, fifteen times in the 2 Chronicles, the subjects of the verb כנע are either Israel, Judah, or the leaders of both countries. The Lord, who has been the protector of the people of Israel, now turns angry at Israel due to the people's sins. However, it is also noteworthy that only two (13:18, 28:19) among fifteen occurrences of כנע in 2 Chronicles involve military actions, thus indicating political humiliation. The rest are spiritual postures of either kingdoms or

¹⁷³ First and second Chronicles use this word nineteen times (3 times in First Chronicles and 16 times in the Second Chronicles) out of thirty-six occurrences of the root in the Hebrew Bible.

kings before God that may be translated into “humble” in later Jewish and Christian spiritual literature.¹⁷⁴

Compared to ענה, כנע appears to have much less socio-economic meaning although both are translated as “humble” or other English synonyms. כנע delivers more meanings of political subjection under the condition of power imbalance between either two countries, or human being (s) and God, when it involves military action. When it means spiritual attitude before God, it can be identified as a synonym of ענה, although ענה reflects the aspects of one’s humiliation imposed violently like rape, thus often creating gender issues, while כנע is usually one’s attitude of submission in a relationship of domination and subjection without any sense of male-female relationship.

3. שפל

Another important word to refer to humility and its linguistic relatives is שפל. The root appears fifty-five times in the Hebrew Bible. As a verb, it occurs thirty times although only seven times is it translated as “to humble” in the NRSV. The basic meaning of this word always stays in the idea of lowness whether it is a state of the physical or the spiritual-psychological realm. The root is well attested in the Semitic cognate languages: Akkadian *šapālu*, be low, deep; Arabic *safala*, *safila*, *safula*, be low; in Imperial Aramaic *špl* occurs in the haphel stem, humiliate; *šepēl* in biblical Aramaic, be low; Syriac *šepal*, be weary, faint, or bring low; Ugaritic *špl*, be low.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ This obvious difference of use of כנע between Deuteronomic and Chronistic history needs further discussion in terms of the development of theological ideas.

¹⁷⁵ Gary Alan Long, “שפל”, *NIDOTTE* 4: 224.

In Leviticus, which is considered as an early document among the books of the Hebrew Bible, the root of שפל appears four times, and without exception, it refers to the difference in depth of skin as a sign of leprosy. But in Samuel, which is considered as contemporary with the priestly books, the root of שפל shows the meaning of “to be low” in human quality (grade, if such exists) in terms of economy, social status, and spiritual posture. 1 Samuel 2:7 says, “The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.” Here this verse pairs “poor” with “brings low” and “rich” with “exalts.” Thus, it clearly suggests that being poor has a cultural connection with being low in the socio-economic system of the author’s day. In 2 Samuel 6:22, David contrasts “being abased in my own eyes” with “being held in honor by the maids.” Again, the meaning of “being low” is introduced as a counter meaning of “being honored.” 2 Samuel 22:28 also gives an important clue as to what שפל may mean.

It is obvious that this word is used to mean the opposite of the “high, exalted, and haughty.” And this placement of the opposite kinds of people in a statement is a preparation to compare what God would do to them. For the humble, there will be deliverance. For the haughty, there will be שפל, “bringing them down.”

The Book of Isaiah uses שפל more than any other books of the Hebrew Bible, but mostly in a negative sense. The word appears eighteen times and fifteen concern the result of God’s punishment. Three exceptions are found in 40:4 and 57:15. שפל in 40:4 seems to have nothing to do with God’s punishment. It speaks of the day that the exiles would return to Jerusalem where God would meet them (v. 5). To make it happen, the prophet proclaims that all the mountains and hills on the way to Jerusalem would be

lowered. On the other hand, two occurrences of שפל in 57:15 call for attention since they tell about one's spiritual posture, unlike other uses of שפל in Isaiah. In both cases, שפל is paired with רוח, translated as "humble in spirit" (NRSV), "spirit of the humble" (KJV), or "spirit of the lowly" (NASB). Thus W. J. Jumbrell points that שפל is used to define humility.¹⁷⁶

The use of שפל in Isaiah seems to speak of the historical process of God's discipline as seen in the Deuteronomistic history, which does not necessarily exclude the view of the Chronicler's history. All the disciplining activities of God through lowering the haughty sinners of Israel now bring forth a positive result in the scene of rewarding the "humble in spirit." The despair has been generated by God because of divine anger toward human sin. But clear reversals of judgment are executed in comforting words in 57:15.¹⁷⁷

4. שחח

In the Hebrew Bible, the root occurs eighteen times.¹⁷⁸ It basically means physical or figurative "low-ness." In Middle Hebrew, שחח means "to stoop down."¹⁷⁹ In El-Amarna text, the root means "to prostrate oneself."¹⁸⁰ As the qal, it may mean "to cower or

¹⁷⁶ W. J. Jumbrell, "שפל," *NIDOTTE* 4: 226.

¹⁷⁷ Christopher R. Seitz, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 483.

¹⁷⁸ Victor Hamilton recognizes only seventeen of them. Victor Hamilton, "שחח," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Henceforth, *TWOT*.

¹⁷⁹ Gustaf Dalman, *Aramäisch-newhebräisches Wörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch* (Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1901), 419.

¹⁸⁰ Wolfram. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch: unter Benutzung des lexikalischen Nachlasses von Bruno Meissner* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959), 1263.

crouch” (Job 38:40, Psalm 10:10, ect.) or “to bow down, or be bent over” (Psalms 38:7, Psalms 35:14, Lamentation 3:20, etc.). As the nifal, it may mean “to be obliged to keep low” (Isaiah 2:9, 5:15) or “to utter low” (Isaiah 29:4, Ecclesiastes 12:4). As the hifil, it can mean “to demolish or throw down” (Isaiah 25:12, 26:5).¹⁸¹

It is noteworthy that the root occurs eight times in Isaiah and seven of them are paired with שפל (2:9, 11, 17; 5:15; 25:12; 26:5; 29:4). The other instance where שחח and שפל appear together is Ecclesiastes 12:4. These pairs are interchangeably translated in many Bible translations. In NRSV, שחח refers to “humbled” and שפל “to be brought low” (Isaiah 2:9, 11; 2:17) and Isaiah 5:15 shows the reverses. In KJV, שחח refers to “to be brought low” and שפל “humbled” (2:11).

5. צנע

Many lexicons define the word צנע as “be modest, with modesty, humble.” However, the basic meaning of the root still is in doubt among scholars.¹⁸² One of the reasons why, although it is not hard to find the root in Semitic cognate languages, is that the meaning of the root varies. *Tsana ‘a* in Arabic means “to do, make, manufacture artistically,” *tsna ‘a* in Ethiopic means “to be hard, solid,” and *tsn ‘* in Old South Arabic means “to fortify a camp.” Besides, as the root of צנע occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible, it is very difficult to observe the semantic range of the word in various contexts.

In the NRSV, Proverbs 11:2 translates it as “humble” and Micah 6:8, “humbly.”

¹⁸¹ Ludwig Köhler, et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1st English ed. vol. 4 (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 1458. Henceforth, *HALOT*.

¹⁸² *HALOT* 3: 1039.

Fortunately, Proverbs 11 is full of contrasts between good and evil and their consequences. For example, v. 1 contrasts false balance with accurate weight and v. 3 the integrity of the upright with the crookedness of the treacherous. One should not hurry to conclude that every verse parallels between antitheses though. For example, there is v. 4 that contrasts riches with righteousness, which does not seem to be a pair of antitheses, so it seems safe to see v. 2 as following the main pattern of other verses. Verse 2 contrasts pride (זדון) with being humble (צניעות). Then, צנע in this context is something pride is not: possibly a state of being conscious of human limitations and thus “modest and in control of oneself.”¹⁸³ Although LXX translates the word into ταπεινών, which usually means poor, lowly, humble, or brokenhearted, the word צנע does not seem to readily deliver the connotation of socio-economical lowliness. Rather, it seems to be a state of mind since the antithesis זדון is understood elsewhere as a state of mind or attitude rather than materialistic prosperity as seen in Proverbs 21:24, “acts of arrogant pride (בְּעִבְרַת זָדוֹן)”; Jeremiah 49:16 “the pride of your heart (זָדוֹן לִבְךָ)”; or Obadiah 1:3, “the pride of your heart (זָדוֹן לִבְךָ).”

On the other hand, the meaning of צנע in Micah 6:8 is difficult to understand since neither the verse nor the surrounding context provides any clue of what צנע would mean. Specifically, when it is combined with “walking,” which occurs only once here in the entire Hebrew Bible, there can be some liberty for commentators to translate it in various

¹⁸³ Uppsala H. Ringgren, “צנע” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, and Helmer Ringgren, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 420. Henceforth, *TDOT*.

ways.¹⁸⁴ George A. Smith has suggested that it may mean “walking in secret with God.”¹⁸⁵ T. H. Robinson has translated it “walk purely.”¹⁸⁶ D. Winton Thomas has questioned the basic meaning of *ננו* in the ancient Hebrew and challenged the traditional translation “Walk humbly.” He compares various etymological derivatives among Semitic languages in light of Semitic philology and suggests that “to empower or preserve” would be a better reading, although the semantic relationship between the two terms still remains questionable.¹⁸⁷ It has also been suggested that the phrase should be interpreted as “walk wisely,” largely based on the Qumran Manual of Discipline rendering and the use of the root in Ecclesiasticus.¹⁸⁸ Considering the difficulty to define the meaning of the word among scholars, it is not surprising that, unlike other lexicons, *TDOT* and *HALOT* do not readily give any definitions of the root *ננו*.

6. כלם

This root refers to “be ashamed, confounded, reproached, hurt, be put to shame, be put to confusion, lush.”¹⁸⁹ There are few identifiable cognates such as Akkadian *kulumu*, with the dominant meaning of “to show or to expose,”¹⁹⁰ or Arabic *kalama*, “to injure.”¹⁹¹ כלם

¹⁸⁴ See Stephen B. Dawes, “Walking Humbly: Micah 6.8 Revisited,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41, no. 3 (1988): 331-339.

¹⁸⁵ George A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets: Commonly Called the Minor Prophets*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929), 455.

¹⁸⁶ T. H. Robinson, “Und in Reinheit wandeln mit deinem Gott.” *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (Handbuch z. A.T., I, 14: Tübingen, 1938), 146.

¹⁸⁷ D. Winton Thomas, “The Root *ננו* in Hebrew and the Meaning of קרניח in Malachi III, 14,” *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 1, no. 4 (1949): 182-188.

¹⁸⁸ W. J. Dumbrell, “*ננו*” in *NIDOTTE* 3: 822.

¹⁸⁹ John J. Oswalt, *TWOT* 1: 443.

¹⁹⁰ Philip J. Nel, *NIDOTTE* 2: 658-659.

¹⁹¹ *HALOT* 2: 480.

generally denotes the sense of disgrace which attends public humiliation.¹⁹² In seventeen verses in the Hebrew Bible the root is used in parallel with בִּיֹּשׁ “to be ashamed” and ten of them are found in Second Isaiah (41:11; 45:16, 17; 50:7; 54:4) and Jeremiah (6:15; 8:12; 14:3; 22:22; 31:19). Another word that is often used with כָּלַם is נָקַן, which prepares the reader to expect to see the reason for the shame.

Oswalt discusses the usage of כָּלַם in detail.¹⁹³ The first usage is “wounding of the body,” supported by two references in 1 Samuel 27:7, 15 where Nabal’s men are said not to have been “hurt” by David. Second, it can refer to “wounding of the spirit through public humiliation,” found in 1 Samuel 20:34 where Saul is said to have shamed David by maligning his character to Jonathan.

7. Other Hebrew Roots

בָּכָה (1 time) Psalm 69:10 (11)

Many lexicons recognize that בָּכָה refers to “weep or bewail.”¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the RSV and NRSV translate it as “humbled” while other translations use “wept.” The reason behind this unique translation seems to be based on the use of בָּכָה as a sign of humbling oneself in repentance, since the expression of this word involves fasting. For example, in 2 Kings 22:19, King Josiah at the reading of the law weeps in humble repentance.

נָעִיר (1 time) 1 Samuel 9:21

The RSV and NRSV translate the word “humblest” instead of “least” as other translations

¹⁹² *TWOT* 1: 443.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 443.

¹⁹⁴ *NIDOTTE*, *TWOT*, *HALOT*, etc.

do. However, even in the RSV and NRSV, twenty-three other occurrences are translated as either “young, youngest, smallest or least” as other translations do.

עֶרֶב (1 time) Lamentations 2:1

עֶרֶב is a unique word in the Hebrew Bible. As a denominal verb (hifil), it appears only once in Lamentations 2:1. Lexicons like *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*¹⁹⁵ or *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* define it as “becloud.” In a poetic expression as found in Lamentation, it shows the sense of God’s anger. However, it seems that NRSV takes the liberty of going between the lines and ends up with the idea of God “humiliating the daughter of Zion.”

8. Humble/Humility Language in the Hebrew Bible

Looking at how often a certain expression is used in literature in a particular genre or time period is helpful to see the connection between the idea behind the word and its social context. For example, if the frequency of the idea of “terrorism” in the American newspapers were greatly increased after the collapse of the twin towers in New York in 2001, it can be said that there is a connection between the idea of “terrorism” and the American society after 9-11. Then, is it possible to see a literary pattern of presenting the idea of humble/humility in the Hebrew Bible according to the genre and historical context? The answer is yes.

The chart and table below show that the Prophets and Writings contain more of humble/humility vocabularies than Torah and Deuteronomistic History. It is not clear

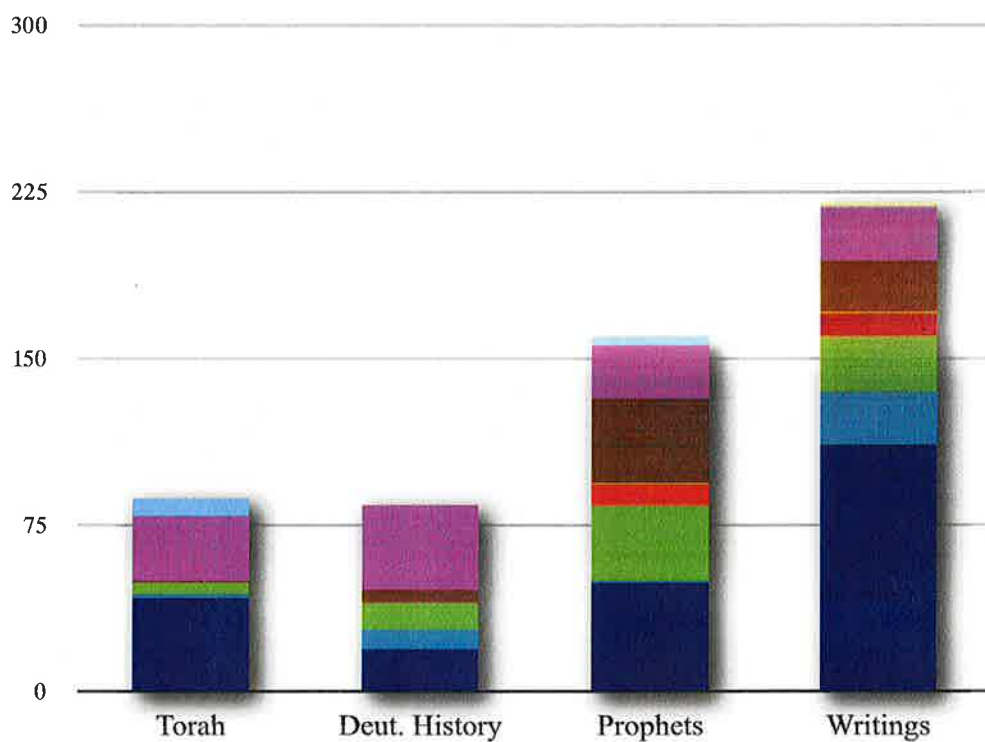
¹⁹⁵ Mark D. Futato, “עֶרֶב,” *NIDOTTE*

though if this shows the chronological stages of development of the idea of humility since scholars have not reached to a consensus in dating each book of the Hebrew Bible.

(Chart 1)

ענה כנע שפל שחה צנע כלם בכה צער
עוב

The Number of Occurrences of the Hebrew Terms “Humble/Humility” in the Hebrew Bible

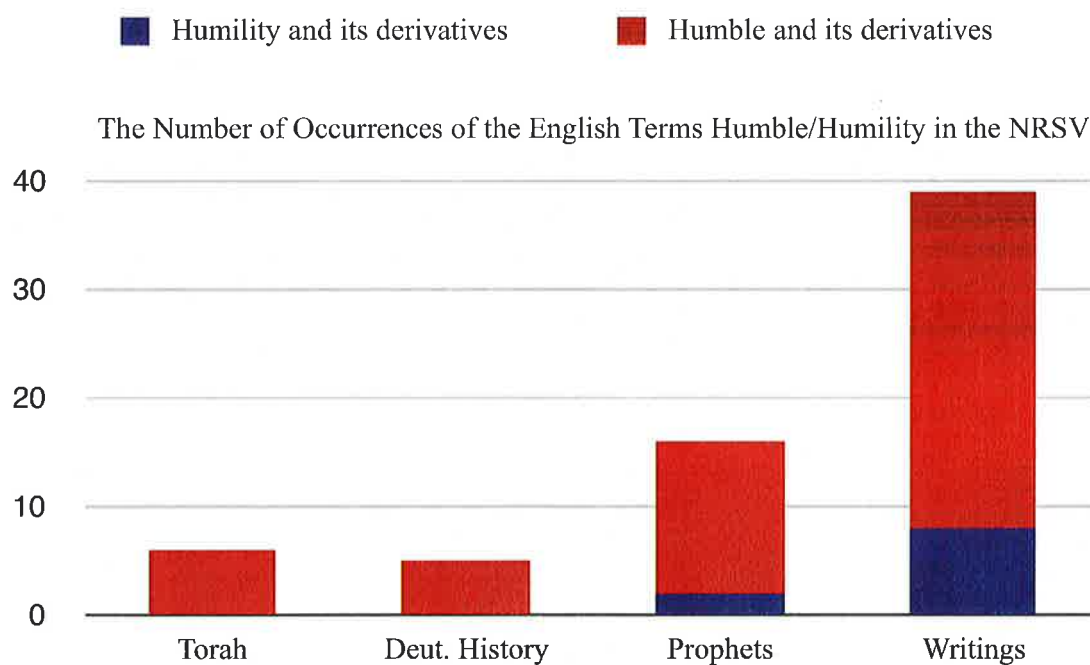


(Table 1)

Heb. Root	Torah	Deut. Hist.	Prophets	Writings
ענה	42	19	49	111
כנע	2	9	1	24

Heb. Root	Torah	Deut. Hist.	Prophets	Writings
שפל	5	12	34	25
שחח	0	0	9	10
צנע	0	0	1	1
כלמ	1	6	38	23
בכה	29	38	24	24
צער	8	0	4	1
עוב	0	0	0	1
Total	87	84	160	220

(Chart 2)



(Table 2)

English Terms	Torah	Deut. Hist.	Prophets	Writings
Humility	0	0	2	8
Humble	6	5	14	31
Total	6	5	16	39

9. Summary

The Hebrew terms for the English word “humble/humility” vary. Each term has its own semantic range and according to the context of the writing, it can have various meanings just like any words in any language. Most of them can be used both positively and negatively. It can be what might lead one to glory or what glory might lead one to. Those terms for “humble/humility” mean the spiritual disposition of either a person or a community as seen in many expressions like “שָׂפָל־רוּחַ” (humble in spirit, Isaiah 57:15; Prov. 16:19; 29:23).” However, in more cases, those terms refer to relational, psychological, economic, political or even sexual debasement, affliction, or suffering.

It is clearly observable in charts one and two that the Writings and Prophets use the terms more than Torah and the Deuteronomistic history do. The English term humble/humility can be found there almost five times more than in the Torah and the Deuteronomistic history in the NRSV. Specifically, “humility” as an abstract noun never appears in Torah and the Deuteronomistic history.

Why do the Prophets and Writings use the term “humility/humble” more often than Torah and the Deuteronomistic history? One simple answer might be found in the differences in genre. Torah and Deuteronomistic history mainly concern the flow of

history and institutionalization of Israel as a kingdom and her fall. The speed of presentation in this genre is much quicker than in the Prophets and Writings. Even though Leviticus and Deuteronomy picture a slice of historical drama before entering the Promised Land, Torah and Deuteronomistic history cover from the story of the Garden of Eden to the fall of Judah. Furthermore, their main goal is not to discuss social justice or human relationships with others even though they contain so many stories of these. They aim to present the nationalistic story of how God instituted Israel as a political entity and how she fell. Accordingly, it provides little space for spiritual and ethical discussion.

The Prophets and Writings, on the other hand, concern human affairs under various socio-political contexts and wisdom within the world where God is in control. As the names of the books of the Prophets imply, many books in this genre present the stories of one generation. They try to reveal the depth of the human soul and the dark side of society, providing ample space for discussing ethics and virtues in reflection of the Law. They do not hesitate to blame social injustice and idolatry as the cause of the social turmoil and humiliation before the world. Naturally, they suggest solutions for the socio-political problems, and certainly one solution is the virtue of humility.

One might suspect, as Wengst does, that humility, known as a virtue, is a later development of Jewish society after experiencing so much national suffering.¹⁹⁶ Even though it is not always clear when each book of the Hebrew Bible was written, who wrote them, and what the sources were, it is generally agreed that the Prophets and Writings were written in and around a the context where suffering abounded. The

¹⁹⁶ See chapter 2.

Israelites observed and experienced many cases of innocent suffering in their own unjust society and later through the fall of the Samaria (2 Kings 17:6) under the Assyrian king Shalmaneser and the fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

One insight to the problem of suffering is found in Torah. Deuteronomy 27 and 28 present a historical perspective that the cause of suffering is disobedience to God. This perspective is concluded in 2 Kings: "Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered the Lord that he expelled them from his presence" (24:20). However, the Deuteronomistic perspective could not satisfy all because it was unable to explain the existence of the innocent suffering.

Orphans, widows, and sojourners do not necessarily cause anger in God. Rather, God is known to be the Protector of the suffering, but they suffer anyway. Why is it so? The book of Job might provide an answer in a series of questions (Job 40-41). But the general approach of the Prophets and Writings to the problem of innocent suffering is very different from that of the Torah and the Deuteronomistic perspective. They suggest that suffering is not necessarily the result of the sins. Specifically in dealing with the concept of humility/humble vocabulary, which often is related to the poverty/suffering vocabulary, the authors of the Prophets and Writings find spiritual value in suffering and it is presented in the idea of humility as a virtue.

SEMANTIC RANGE OF HONOR/GLORY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

It is a well known fact that “humble/humility” is the opposite of “proud/pride” for both Jewish and Christian literature. In the Hebrew Bible, they are placed together as contrary concepts two times (Job 22:29; Prov. 29:23). However, in the Hebrew Bible, the word “humility” is directly contrasted with “honor” four times in Proverbs (Prov. 15:33; 18:12; 22:4; 29:23). So, it is helpful to know the concept of honor/glory in the Hebrew language to understand the concept of humble/humility.

According to the NRSV, the English word “glory” and its derivatives appear two hundred forty-seven times in the Hebrew Bible. In the same translation, the English word “honor” and its derivatives appear one hundred fifteen times in the Hebrew Bible. In many cases the noun “glory” is translated as “honor” in other translations. For example, in Exodus 14:4, כבוד is translated as “glory” whereas in the NASB and KJV as “honor.” The opposite is also possible. In Genesis 45:13, while כבוד is translated as “honored” in the NRSV, the KJV translates it as “glory.” The corresponding Hebrew words for “honor/glory” in NRSV are as follows: כבוד (243 times), יקר (20 times), צבי (8 times), פאר (28 times), נצח (2 times), הדר (14 times), אדר (2 times), גאח (7 times), and הוד (10 times).

1. כבוד

This root, widely attested in various Semitic languages, is the most often used Hebrew word for “honor/glory” in English. Although it is noticeable that the root is prominent in Psalms (64 occurrences) and Isaiah (63 occurrences), no one can convincingly argue that there is a pattern or specific genre that calls for the use of “honor/glory” in the Hebrew

Bible. Most lexicons recognize that the basic meaning of the root is “heaviness.”¹⁹⁷

Usually, כבד is used in a figurative sense meaning “seriousness of things”¹⁹⁸ or “honor/glory.” Other possible translations for the root כבד and its derivatives include “unresponsive, difficult, numerous (abundant), tired, or liver.”

Among one hundred fourteen occurrences of כבד as a verb, it is piel that mostly means “to honor”¹⁹⁹ or its synonyms which are always interchangeable with the translation, “to acknowledge someone as weighty.”²⁰⁰ For example, the fifth of the Ten Commandments says, “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). When used as a nifal, כבד connotes “to be honored” by others. For example, when Shechem was asked to be circumcised, he did not delay. And the Scripture says, “He was the most honored of all his family (Genesis 34:19).”

The noun כבוד appears two hundred times throughout the Hebrew Bible, except in some books: Judges, 2 Samuel, 2 Kings, Joel, Jonah, Zephaniah, Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Ezra. In comparison, Isaiah has thirty eight occurrences and Psalms has fifty-one. However, if one considers the occurrences per word, Haggai is the book that uses the word most heavily (3.25 times per 1000 words) followed by Habakkuk (2.96 times per 1000 words).

One interesting insight on כבוד is suggested by Westermann.²⁰¹ There are few

¹⁹⁷ For example, *TDOT*, *NIDOTE*, *TLOT*, *TWOT*, etc.

¹⁹⁸ *NIDOTTE* 2: 577-588.

¹⁹⁹ *TLOT* 2: 590.

²⁰⁰ In Chinese, 重要 or 重大 means “important.” Here the character 重 means “to be heavy” or “weight.”

²⁰¹ *TLOT* 2: 595.

passages that pair “riches (wealth)” with “honor” and most of them occur in Chronicles and Proverbs. The first pair in the Hebrew Bible, however, occurs in 1 Kings 3:13. “I give you (Solomon)...riches and honor.” It seems to make sense that this first appearance of the pair occurs in the time of building a new strong monarchy. Finally, Israel develops a new social class system that includes the rise of a royal family. “A class of wealthy and powerful families arises, and respect for this rich upper class is now designated by “honor.””²⁰² This view can be supported by the fact that the first person in the Hebrew Bible who receives these “riches and honor” is David. 1 Chronicles. 29:28 says, “He (David) died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor; and his son Solomon succeeded him.”

Other than David and Solomon, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah are the only other rulers who possessed both “riches and honor” according to Chronicles, although one may assume all the kings of the Bible might possess considerable wealth. This may mean that riches do not always guarantee one personal honor. There are more qualifications for being called one who has “riches and honor” in Chronicles. First, one must be righteous before the LORD. Jehoshaphat did the right thing in the sight of the LORD (1 Kings 22:43), and Hezekiah did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God (2 Chr. 31:20). Second, one must be of the southern kingdom. No king of the northern kingdom is recorded to have had “riches and honor.” Third, one must be a king. There is no ordinary person who enjoyed “riches and honor” except these four kings.

In many cases, the use of כבוד is associated with God and God’s presence. God is

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 595.

the “God of כבוד (Ps. 29:3).” This phrase may mean two things. First, God is the one who gives כבוד: “My כבוד I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images” (Isa. 42:8). Second, God is the one who deserves כבוד. Even divine beings offer God כבוד (Ps. 29:1). According to Psalm 66:1, the whole earth is to sing the כבוד of God’s name and praise God by offering כבוד.

The relationship of כבוד (honor) with ענה II (humility) in Proverbs is very comparable and there is no instance in the Hebrew Bible that contrasts כבוד with ענה II. Three verses (15:33, 18:2, and 22:4) state that ענה (humility) causes כבוד (honor). Verses 15:33 and 18:2 say, “וּלְפָנַי כְּבוֹד עֲנָה” (humility goes before honor)” and 22:4 says, “The reward for humility is riches and honor.” Namely, humility is a precondition of honor, at least in the world of Proverbs. שפל, on the other hand, is contrasted with כבוד in Proverbs 29:23. “A person’s pride will bring humiliation (שפל), but one who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor (כבוד).” However, even in this case, it confirms that lowly (שפל) in spirit will lead one to gaining honor (כבוד), which can be seen in the case of humility (ענה) that causes honor (כבוד).

The Hebrew idea that may defy the condition of honor is the idea of shame (dishonor) which is expressed by many words: קלה, כלם, קלל, or נבל, etc. In Jeremiah 14:21, the writer cries out to God in a form of prayer, “Do not dishonor (אל־תְּנִיבֵל) your glorious (כְּבוֹדֶךָ) throne.” In Hosea 4:7, it is very clear that shame is the opposite of honor: “They changed their glory into shame (וַיִּקְיֹא וַיִּלְקֹב מְדֻבָּב).” Habakkuk 2:16 shows that shame is the antithesis of glory: “Shame will come upon your glory (וַיִּקְלֵן עַל־כְּבוֹדֶךָ).”

This is also evident in 1 Samuel 2:30: “For those who honor (כבוד) me I will honor (כבוד), and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt (קלל).”

2. יקר

Although this root appears only seventy-one times in the Hebrew Bible, including ten passages in the Aramaic sections, it represents a common Semitic root.²⁰³ It appears in Ugaritic, Akkadian, East Canaanite, Arabic, etc. It usually carries the meaning of value, weight, and honor just as in the case of כבוד. The root appears as verb (qal and hifil), adjective, and noun although one should take note that this root does not appear in the entire Pentateuch, Joshua, or Judges, or in the Minor Prophets except for three late passages in Zechariah. Neither is it found in the Song of Songs, Ruth, or Nehemiah.

As a noun, יקר means “honor” or distinction of a royal sort.²⁰⁴ Indeed, “honor”—particularly as bestowed by a greater authority upon a lesser—appears as a major theme in later writings whose literary settings are the imperial courts of Gentile rulers. According to the NRSV, the root is translated as honor/glory seven times in Esther (1:20; 6:3, 6, 7, 9, 11; 8:16) while כבוד is used only once (5:11) to mean honor. The concept of honor plays an important role in chapter 6 as the Persian king tries to reward Mordecai, who has saved the king from assassination. All of the suggestions Haman makes, mistakenly thinking he would be the one to be honored, are ways to publicly recognize or honor (יקר) Mordecai: wearing the royal robe, riding the horse of the king, and letting one

²⁰³ Leipzig S. Wagner, “יקר,” *TDOT* 6: 279. *TDOT* counts 73 occurrences.

²⁰⁴ William Yarchin, “יקר,” *NIDOTTE* 2: 523.

of the king's most noble officials conduct Mordecai on horseback through the open square of the city.

In Daniel, the root appears twelve times, and eight times (2:6, 37; 4:27, 33; 5:18, 20; 7:14; 11:38) it is translated as either honor or glory in the NRSV. The context of Daniel's use of the root יקר is very similar to that of Esther. In 2:6, as Xerxes tries to reward Mordecai with highest honor for his heroic deed in the book of Esther, Nebuchadnezzar tries to reward Daniel with great honor (יקר שניא). As Daniel begins his interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, he speaks of the king's glory (יקר) given from the God of heaven and this is almost exactly repeated in 5:18. In response to Daniel's speech, Nebuchadnezzar also uses the root יקר to mean honor/glory. He talks about his effort to build the glory of his majesty (4:27). The glory of his kingdom has been restored to him (4:33) after a brief loss due to his health issue.

Unlike כבד, neither is יקר directly compared nor contrasted with any Hebrew words that may mean "humility" or "shame." However, whereas the book of Esther does not contain any of the "humble/humility" words, Daniel does have שפל (5:22) and הונע (10:12). שפל is used in the context of Belshazzar's rule and in this passage, humbled (שפל) is not an antithesis of glory (יקר) but an antidote that would keep one from losing glory. In chapter 5, Daniel is brought in before the king to read and interpret the mysterious writing on the wall of the palace. He stands before Belshazzar, the king, and begins criticizing him by telling his father Nebuchadnezzar's story. God gave the king glory (יקר). But he acted proudly so that his glory (יקר) was stripped from him. Although Belshazzar knew this, he did not humble (שפל) himself but arrogantly used the vessels of

the Jerusalem temple to drink wine with his officials, wives, and concubines.

3. צִבִּי

In the NRSV, out of thirty uses of צִבִּי, thirteen times it is used to mean “gazelle,” nine times “beauty/beautiful,” and eight times “glory/glorious” (2 Sam. 1:19, Isaiah 13:19; 23:9; 24:16; 28:5, Ezekiel 20:6, 15; 25:9). צִבִּי can be applied to people. In 2 Sam. 1:19, Jonathan and Saul are Israel’s glory²⁰⁵ and in Isaiah 13:9, the LORD will defile the pride of all glory, while the noun refers to the abstract property of beauty or glory in Isaiah 24:16: “glory to the Righteous One.” In many cases, specifically in Ezekiel, it is used to depict the state of locations. Isaiah 13:19 speaks of Babylon as “the glory of kingdoms.” All three uses of צִבִּי for “glory” in Ezekiel are about land. Ezekiel 20:6 and 15 talk about the Promised Land as “the most glorious of all lands.” In Ezekiel 25:9, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon and Kiriathaim are “the glory of the country.”²⁰⁶

In a few cases (Jeremiah 3:19; Ezekiel 7:20; Daniel 8:9; 11:16, 41, 45), צִבִּי is translated as “beautiful,” which is a big part of its semantic range. Thus, its closest synonym is פֶּאֶר, which often is paired with צִבִּי (Isaiah 13:19; 28:1, 4, 5). Isaiah 13:9 says, “Babylon, the glory (צִבִּי) of kingdoms, the splendor (פֶּאֶר) and pride of the Chaldeans!” גִּאָה often is paired with צִבִּי too (Isaiah 4:2; 13:19; 23:9; 24:16).

צִבִּי is not compared or contrasted with any humility/humble words. Instead, it is

²⁰⁵ It can be translated as “gazelle of Israel.” David N. Freedman, “The Refrain in David’s Lament over Saul and Jonathan,” in *Studies in the History of Religions/Supplements to Numen* 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 272-273. This translation is supported by William H. Shea, “Chiasmus and the Structure of David’s Lament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 1 (1986): 13-15.

²⁰⁶ Although translated as “beautiful” Daniel 8:9; 11:16, 41, 45 use צִבִּי as an adjective for either land or mountain.

paired with impurity/uncleanness (נדר) in Ezekiel 7:20. “I will make of it (their beautiful ornament) an unclean thing (נדר) to them.” In Isaiah 23:9, there are two sets of curses: “to defile the pride of all glory,” and “to shame all the honored of the earth.” In the plan of the LORD, the honored (כבוד) will suffer shame (קלל). This curse is preceded by another curse, which is a literary repetition, that the pride of all glory (צבי) will suffer defilement (חלל). Here קלל and חלל make a rhyme and carry the opposite meaning of כבוד and צבי.

4. פאר

Out of forty-nine occurrences, twenty-eight of those are translated “glory/honor” in the NRSV. In many instances, it also is translated “beauty” (Isaiah 44:13; 52:1; 62:3; 64:11; Jeremiah 13:11, 18, 20; Ezekiel 16:12, 17, 39; 23:42, and Psalm 96:6). It is considered as a derivative of the root פאר generally translated as “to beautify/glorify.”²⁰⁷ As a verb, this root appears thirteen times in the Hebrew Bible, six times in the piel and seven times in the hithpael. Nine of them occur in Isaiah (10:15; 44:23; 49:3; 55:5; 60:7, 9, 13, 21; 61:3). Even though there are a few exceptions, it is obvious that הפארה mainly appears in the late writings such as second and third Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Chronicles.

It is obvious that פאר has a parallel relationship with כבוד. One of the examples is found in both Exodus 28:2 and 40. Here the vestments of Aaron and his sons are pictured and פאר appears in combination with כבוד to increase the sense of greatness. Slightly different, but in the same sense, Isaiah 60:13 juxtaposes ראפ and כבוד: “to beautify (פאר)

²⁰⁷ Victor Hamilton, “פאר,” *TLOT* 3: 713.

the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify (כבוד) where my feet rest.” In this passage, the sanctuary refers to “where my feet rest” of the following clause and, thus, “to beautify” seems to be paired with “glorify” and have the same or similar meaning.

In one place, פאר appears with שפל. “Take a lowly (שפל) seat, for your beautiful (תפארת) crown has come down from your head” (Jeremiah 13:18). This passage relates the historical happening of destruction of the Davidic dynasty with the fate the royal family would face. It seems that the idea of “lowly” represents the antithesis of “beautiful.”

5. נצח

Out of forty-three occurrences, twice the NRSV translates נצח as “glory.” In 1 Samuel 15:29, God is called “the Glory of Israel (נצח ישראל)”. The second use of נצח translated as “glory” is found in Lamentations 3:18. In this passage, the singer cries out in the depth of sorrow, “Gone is my glory!”

Most lexicons show the complexity of the nature of the root, thus having difficulties to analyze, define, and explain the root. They usually differentiate נצח from נצח. The simplest description of the root is found in Anderson’s article in *TDOT*²⁰⁸ whereas *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* provides eight different homonyms since there is no common theme among the meanings in the semantic range of the root.²⁰⁹ He provides two basic homonyms, conveniently called נצח I, associated with a semantic group: gleam, distinguish oneself (hithpael), conquer, be permanent, and supervise.

²⁰⁸ G. W. Anderson, “נצח,” *TDOT* 9: 529-532.

²⁰⁹ David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 738-740 .

However, he notes that philologists are uncertain as to their relationship²¹⁰ since there is no agreeable theme that would embrace all five different meanings. The root נָצַח II is associated with the meaning of “sprinkle.” Albright derives נָצַח from this root and deduces the meaning “vital force, permanence.”²¹¹ It is not always clear which root is suitable in the translation of נָצַח in a particular passage, even while taking the context of the story into careful consideration. Thus, it is not surprising to find that in translating Isaiah 63:3 and 6, some translations use the second root that they translate as “juice” while scholars like Scullion derive the noun from the first root to mean “glory.”²¹²

HALOT provides four roots and each root has its own semantic range.²¹³ נָצַח I means in Biblical Aramaic “lasting,” “successful,” “fight,” or “discuss.” In piel, it refers to “inspecting” which often is used in the report of the temple building in Ezra 3:8, 1 Chronicles 23:4, or 2 Chronicles 2:1-17. In many cases, the root is used at the beginning of various Psalms (55 times) to mean “for the director of the music.” As with *TDOT*, נָצַח II means “to sprinkle.” On the other hand, simply containing vowels, נָצַח I means “splendor,” “glory,” “duration,” or “successful” while נָצַח II means “juice” as seen in Isaiah 63:3 and 6.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Anderson, 530.

²¹¹ William F. Albright, “The Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from Sinai and Their Decipherment,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 11 (1948): 6-22.

²¹² John J. Scullion, “Some Difficult Texts in Isaiah cc. 56-66 in the Light of Modern Scholarship,” *Ugarit-Forschungen*, 4 (1972): 122.

²¹³ “נָצַח,” *HALOT* 2: 716.

²¹⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, however, there is no passage where the root נָצַח is either compared, contrasted, paired, or paralleled with any words meaning humble/humility.

6. הדר

Out of forty-five occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, the NRSV translates the root as glory/honor fourteen times (Exodus 23:3; Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21; Micah 2:9; Psalm 8:6; 90:16; 96:6; 145:5; 149:9; Daniel 4:34, 37; 5:23; 11:20). It is translated as “majesty” thirteen times, “splendid/splendor” seven times. Both *TWOT* and *NIDOTTE* recognize it as a verb; the root seems to be that of deferring to someone out of respect. For example, the young are to honor the elderly (Lev. 19:32).

The root often is paired with הדר applied to God (Job 40:10; Psalm 21:6; 45:4; 96:6; 104:1; 111:3, 145:5, and 1 Chr. 16:27). כבוד as a noun is another word that often is paired with the noun הדר (Isaiah 35:2, Psalm 8:6; 21:6; 145:5, 12). And in two instances (Psalm 21:5; 145:5), all three of them appear together to maximize what the psalmist tries to say.

The root appears in Daniel 4:34 with the root שפל (humble/humility). Nebuchadnezzar honors (הדר) God for God’s ability to bring low (שפל) those who walk in pride (גאה). In this case, the root הדר is not directly compared with שפל, however. The word paired with שפל is גוזה (be exalted).

In Torah, it appears six times and is never used for God. In Genesis, it is a name of the eighth ruler of the Edomite King list in 36:39. Exodus 23:3 says that honoring the poor in a lawsuit is as bad as honoring the rich. In Leviticus, it refers to honoring the rich (19:15) and to honoring the old (19:32). In one instance it refers to trees (23:40). In comparison, other Hebrew words meaning honor/glory, for example נצה or כבוד

appears more often in the later writings and many of them refer to God's majesty, unlike the Deuteronomistic writings.

It is also noticeable that the book of Daniel uses *הדר* (7 times) and *יקר* (8 times) to mean "honor/glory" more than *כבוד*, which is much more popular throughout the Hebrew Bible (200 times). *כבוד* appears three times in Daniel: 11:38 contains two as a verb and 11:39 contains one as a noun.

7. אדר

In the Hebrew Bible, this root rarely appears as a verb. The derivatives include *אָדָר* (glory, magnificence; mantle, cloak), *אָדִיר* (majestic), and *אָדָרָה* (glory, cloak). It occurs twice in the nifal (Ex. 15:6 and 11) and once in the hifil (Is. 42:21). The NRSV translates the root as honor/glory only in Exodus. 15:6 and Isaiah. 42:21. In Zechariah. 11:13, it is translated "lordly" to mean "more than enough" or "huge amount of" whereas the KJV translates it "goodly." In Exodus 15:6, God's arm is "glorious in power" evidently referring to God's might and strength in general.²¹⁵ Cognates are attested in Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Jewish Aramaic.²¹⁶ Coppes finds that this root connotes something superior in relationship with other things or people. Therefore, it may mean "majestic."²¹⁷ In Phoenician, the root refers to "to be powerful."²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Gösta Ahlström, "אָדִיר," *TDOT* 1: 73.

²¹⁶ C. John Collins, "רָדָא," *NIDOTTE* 1: 29.

²¹⁷ Leonard J. Coppes, "אָדִיר," *TWOT* 1: 13.

²¹⁸ "אָדִיר" *HALOT* 1: 16-17.

In many passages, the root refers to the name of the twelfth month “*Addar*” (Esther 3:7, 13; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21). In some passages, it refers to the names of locations: Hazar-addar (Num. 34:4), Addar (Josh. 15:3), and Ataroth-addar (Josh. 16:5; 18:13). In one passage, it refers to a personal name (1 Chr. 8:3). In Micah 2:8, it is used to mean “robe.”

8. גָּאָה

גָּאָה and its derivatives appear ninety-nine times in the Hebrew Bible. The root is well attested in Aramaic, Syriac, Mandaean, Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Arabic to mean “to exalt oneself, be arrogant, the glorious one, to be presumptuous, pride, arrogance, honor, favor, excellence, or to be high.”²¹⁹ In the NRSV it is translated as “glory” seven times (Ex. 15:1, 21; Lev. 26:19; Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; 12:5). Both *TWOT* and *NIDOTTE* state that the primary meaning of the root is “to rise.”²²⁰ It is used with the literal sense of plants rising up (Job 8:11; Jer 12:5; 49:19; 50:44; Zech. 11:3), water rising up (Ezek. 47:5), or smoke rising up in the sky (Isa 9:18).

Understandably, the root is translated as “pride/proud” in the NRSV fifty times in figurative sense, which LXX many times translates as “ὑψηλός.” Except in Isaiah 4:2; 13:3 and Psalm 47:4, all forty-seven of גָּאָה translated as “pride/proud” refer to the attitude that God hates. The LORD of hosts has a day against all that is “proud and lofty” (Isa 2:12). The LORD of hosts has planned it--to defile the “pride of all glory” (Isa. 23:9). I (LORD)

²¹⁹ Diether Kellermann, “גָּאָה,” *TDOT* 2: 345.

²²⁰ *TDOT* defines the root’s basic meaning as “to be or become high.” Ibid., 346-347. In three places, Jeremiah 13:17; Job 22:29; 33:17, the root may mean “back.” In Job 20:25, the root is translated “body” in many translations like NRSV, KJV, ESV, and ASV.

will ruin the “pride of Judah” (Jer. 13:9). I (LORD) abhor the “pride of Jacob” (Amos 6:8). Therefore, it is not surprising that the root נָאָה is paired in eight passages with שָׁפַל (Isa. 2:12; 13:11; 25:11; Job 22:29; 40:11; Prov. 16:9; 29:23; Dan. 4:37) to show the result of pride or arrogance.

The root is used positively also. When the root is associated with the description of God, it is usually translated as “glory” or “majesty.” For example, in Miriam’s song of victory, people are encouraged to sing to the LORD because the LORD has triumphed “gloriously” (Ex. 15:21). It can be positive when it refers to the land of Israel. “The fruit of the land shall be the “pride” and glory of the survivors of Israel” (Isa. 4:2).

In a few cases, the root is repeated to form an idiomatic expression.²²¹ It can be a positive description of what the LORD has done, as found in Exodus 15:1: נָאָה גָּאָה (triumphed gloriously, NRSV). Of course, it can be negative as seen in several passages: וַגָּאוֹנוֹ וַגָּאֻתּוֹ (his arrogance, his pride, Isa. 16:6, NRSV), וַגָּאוֹנוֹ וַגָּאֻתּוֹ (his loftiness, his pride, Jer. 48:29, NRSV), and גָּאָה וַגָּאוֹן (pride and arrogance, Prov. 8:13, NRSV).

In two places, the root is paralleled with כָּבוֹד/כְּבוֹד but with totally opposite meanings. In Isaiah 23:9, the LORD will defile the “pride (גָּאוֹן)” of all glory, and shame all the “honored (נִכְבְּדִי)” of the earth. In this passage, the “pride” and “the honored” will suffer the same negative destiny. In Proverbs 29:23, on the other hand, pride is the very condition that will lead one to humiliation while the humiliation in spirit (שָׁפַל־רוּחַ) will reward one with honor.

In the Pentateuch, the root נָאָה rarely occurs (8 times in total). The

²²¹ It is like the English expression, “wear and tear.”

Deuteronomistic history does not include the root נאה at all. The root mostly appears in the prophetic writings, specifically in First Isaiah. Unlike other roots meaning “honor/glory,” the root does not appear in Chronicles. First and Second Chronicles use כבוד, הוד, or הדר (total 33 times) instead.

9. הוד

This root occurs twenty-five times in the Hebrew Bible. Ten are translated “honor/glory” in the NRSV (Hab. 3:3; Zech. 6:13, Psalm 8:2; 45:4; 96:6; 111:3; 148:13; Job 40:10; Prov. 5:9; 1 Chr. 16:27). Even though the etymological derivation of the root is disputable,²²² most lexicons assume that it is related to Arabic “*’awada* (to be heavy),” West Semitic *ydh* “to praise,” or Arabic *nahuda* “to be beautiful, strong.”²²³

הוד frequently appears with הדר (majesty, honor, glory) so that one may get a hint of the root’s semantic field. The instances are found in Psalm 21:6; 45:4; 96:6; 104:1; 111:3; Job 40:10; 1 Chr. 16:27. Specifically in Psalms, the root is usually found in the phrase “הוד והדר” translated as “glory and majesty” according to the NRSV.

When used theologically, the root often denotes the revelation of God’s majesty.²²⁴ “You have set your glory (הוד) above the heavens (Ps. 8:2, NRSV).” “Full of honor (הוד) and majesty is his work (Ps. 111:3, NRSV).” “His glory (הוד) covered the heavens (Hab. 3:3, NRSV).”

The root can serve as a royal attribute of the kings. “Splendor and majesty you

²²² Kiel G. Warmuth, “הוד,” *TWOT* 3: 352.

²²³ D. Vetter, “הוד,” *TLOT* 1: 355; Victor Hamilton, “הוד,” *TWOT* 3: 353; “הוד,” *HALOT* 1: 241.

²²⁴ Kiel G. Warmuth, “הוד,” *TDOT* 3: 353.

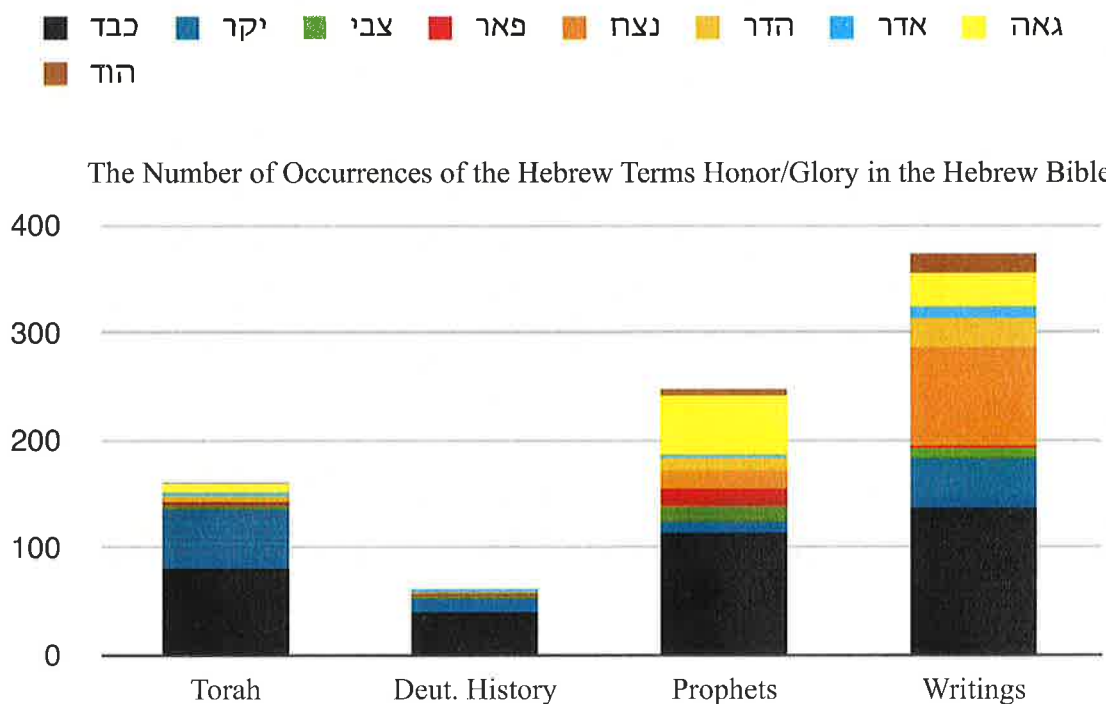
bestow on him (Psalm 21:6, NRSV).” “Alas, his majesty (Jer. 22:18)!” The phrase “מְלָכוּת” occurs in 1 Chronicles 29:25 and Daniel 11:21 to mean “royal majesty.” Of course, this root can be applied to non-royal leaders like Joshua. In the scene of the “ordination” of Joshua in Numbers 27, Moses asks the Israelites to respect Joshua as their new leader and as a sign of the new leadership, he transfers his הָדָר to Joshua. Since Joshua is neither a god nor a king, the NRSV translates it as “authority” while the NIV uses “your best strength” (Num. 27:20).

The root never occurs in the Deuteronomistic history. In the Pentateuch, it appears only once in Numbers. As other roots that denote “honor/glory” this root occurs mostly in the late writings such as Daniel, Chronicles, and some of the Psalms.

10. Honor/Glory Language in the Hebrew Bible

If humble/humility language is used more in the Prophets and Writings than Torah and Deuteronomistic History, can one expect the same pattern in the use of honor/glory language which is the antithesis of humble/humility? The charts and tables in the next two pages show that the answer is yes.

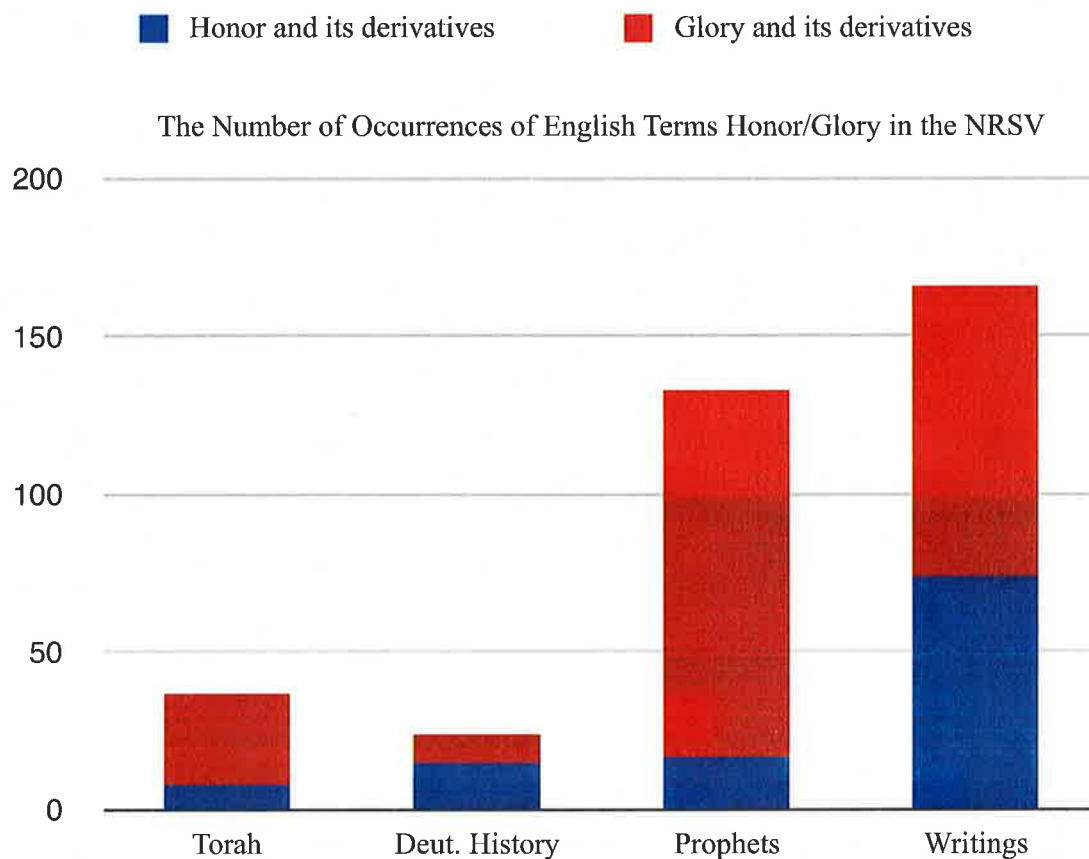
(Chart 3)



(Table 3)

Heb. Root	Torah	Deut. History	Prophets	Writings
כבוד	81	40	114	137
יקר	55	13	11	47
צבי	4	3	14	9
פאר	3	1	16	2
נצח	0	2	17	92
הדר	6	0	12	27
אדר	3	3	3	11
גאה	8	0	55	31
הוד	1	0	6	18
Total	161	62	248	374

(Chart 4)



(Table 4)

English Terms	Torah	Deut. History	Prophets	Writings
Honor	8	15	17	74
Glory	29	9	116	92
Total	37	24	133	166

11. Summary

As seen in the case of humble/humility, the Hebrew terms for honor/glory show the same linguistic pattern. First, they can be either positive or negative according to the context. Second, they occur almost three times more in the Prophets and Writings than in the Torah and Deuteronomistic history. In the NRSV, the English words humble/humility and their derivatives appear five times more in the Prophets and Writings than in the Torah and Deuteronomistic history.

It is an interesting observation that where the idea of humble/humility abounds, the idea of honor/glory does too (Chart 3 and 4). First, it probably is due to the nature of literature as discussed in the case of “humble/humility” language. As one needs to use the idea of light to explain the idea of darkness, the writers of the Bible probably were in need of both ideas of humble/humility and honor/glory to unfold their thoughts. Second, considering the undetachable relationship between writing and the “*Sitz im Leben*,” the use of both terms in the same genre may reflect their “*Sitz im Leben*,” during or after exile, in which people needed to reconsider their way of life, “repent of their past sins,” and project the ideal of human life.

A CASE STUDY: MOSES IN NUMBERS 12

As observed in most English translations like the NRSV, NIV, KJV, RSV, ASV, ESV, and NASB that employ either “meek” or “humble” to translate the Hebrew adjective נָחַם in Numbers 12:3, it is widely accepted that the passage talks about the humility of Moses as a virtue. The majority of modern day commentaries, thus, assume that the adjective is to

mean “humility” or “meekness.” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* says, “Numbers 12:3 states the ideal: The most charismatic leader is the most humble person on earth. Humility is selflessness before God and others.”²²⁵ The *Word Biblical Commentary* also comments that עָנָו means “humble.” It claims, “The point here seems to be that Moses is not self-assertive.”²²⁶ The *Anchor Bible* joins the majority with a perspective that עָנָו in Numbers 12:3 is the same as the עָנָו in Zephaniah 2:3. Therefore, it claims, it is correct to translate עָנָו as “humble.”²²⁷ Ashley of *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* understands the verse as a work of the narrator to answer the possible question of why Moses would let the challenge of Aaron and Miriam go unanswered and why God answered instead.²²⁸ It is because of Moses’ humility.

The idea of Moses as the most humble person on the earth pictured in Numbers 12:3 is mostly unchallenged even in some literature specializing in Judaism. *Tanakh* translates the verse, “Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth.” *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* defines humility as among the greatest of the virtues in the Jewish tradition, as seen in Numbers 12:3 in the description of Moses.²²⁹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* also introduces Moses as an exemplar of

²²⁵ Thomas B. Dozeman, *The Book of Numbers*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al., vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 112.

²²⁶ Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, v. 5 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 136.

²²⁷ Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 328.

²²⁸ Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, of *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1993), 224.

²²⁹ Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 255.

humility. “The greatest of prophets, Moses, is singled out as being “exceedingly humble,” above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.”²³⁰ *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* speaks on Numbers 12:3, “In him (Moses), a true and worthy servant of God, humility and strength were finely balanced.”²³¹

Early Church Fathers who used the Septuagint as their Bible also understood that the term might refer to Moses’ humility. Gregory of Nyssa said, “It is said of Moses that he was superior to anger and desire. History testifies that he was the “meekest” of men—an incapacity for anger is shown through mildness and an aversion to wrath—and that he desired none of the things the desiring element in many people is directed towards.”²³² Chrysostom also said, “Moses was the meekest of all men on earth.”²³³

However, not everybody sees it in a positive sense. Origen, who knew Hebrew well, would most likely be the first one who provided a different opinion from others on Numbers 12:3. He thought that the term should be understood as a negative description of Moses:

“Moreover, Moses himself, in spirit of all the great and splendid achievements of faith and patience that are recorded of him, was *never so highly praised* by God as on this occasion when he took the Ethiopian wife. It is said of him, in reference to this: “Moses was a man exceeding

²³⁰ R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 341.

²³¹ W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah, a Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 970.

²³² Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and the Resurrection,” in *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari et al., trans. Virginia W. Callahan, vol. 58 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1966), 218.

²³³ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Walter J. Burghardt, trans. Paul W. Harkins, vol. 31 of *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963), 64-65.

meek above all men that are upon earth.”²³⁴

Already in the beginning of the twentieth century, Gray pointed out that this translation had been troublesome for the scholars who were bound by the theory of the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch.²³⁵ How can a person like Moses, who is supposed to be humble, blatantly proclaim that he is the most humble man on the earth? It would be a self-defeating statement.

There have been several scholars who suggested alternative translations of עָנָו. Coates argues in his article that it is not clear that the words, “meek” or “humble” do justice as tools for translating עָנָו because in his definition “meek” or “humble” has nothing to do with Moses’ character explained in Numbers 12:7, “He (Moses) is entrusted with all my house.” Coates’ suggestion is that the adjective עָנָו in verse 3 is from the עָנָה I meaning “to answer.” From this argument, he concludes that עָנָו should mean either “honor” or “integrity.”²³⁶

Coates is not alone in departing from the traditional notion of Moses as a humble man, thus searching for better alternatives. After an extensive consideration of the

²³⁴ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Walter J. Burghardt, trans. R. P. Lawson, vol. 26 of *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), 2. 1. It is known that Origen knew both Hebrew and Greek. Thus, it is possible that he recognized that the Hebrew *anaw* translated into *praus* in Greek is a difficult one.

²³⁵ George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903), 123.

²³⁶ George W. Coates, “Humility and Honor: A Moses Legend in Numbers 12 in David J. A. Clines, et al., *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series*, 19 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 99-102. See Stephen K. Sherwood, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, of *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002), 155-156.

narrative context, Rogers concludes that עָנָה might refer to negative connotations like “bowed down with care,” “oppressed,” “burdened down,” or more accurately “miserable” as Daniel 4:24 uses it.²³⁷ Rogers seems to be correct that עָנָה in Numbers 12:3 can be either an answer to why Moses did not do anything about the challenge of Aaron and Miriam as observed by many commentators, or a simple description of the situation Moses was in, which is “miserable” according to his conclusion.

In answering to Rogers, Dawes stands on the side of defending the conventional translation of “humble” based on his contextual analysis and the popular use of the root עָנָה in later writings.²³⁸ He thinks that Numbers 12:3 is an editorial comment to defend Moses against an accusation made by Miriam and Aaron. In that perspective, עָנָה must be a special virtue of Moses that would bring him enough moral power to cancel their accusation and let the LORD speak for Moses. Therefore, “humble” is one of the strongest candidates for the translation of עָנָה.

To examine the true meaning of the root עָנָה in Numbers 12:3, one must begin with how the root is used in the Torah. In the Pentateuch, the root עָנָה as a verb is used twenty-five times (Gen 15:13; 16:6, 9; 31:50; 34:2; Ex 1:11-12; 10:3; 22:21-22; Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32; Num 24:24; 29:7; 30:14; Deut 8:2-3, 16; 21:14; 22:24, 29; 26:6). However, one should notice that most of those occurrences do not refer to a virtue or higher ethical state. In most passages, they appear to negatively mean “to be afflicted” or “to treat harshly.” Exodus 10:3 is the only place where the verb may look positive as reflected in

²³⁷ Cleon Rogers, “Moses: Meek or Miserable?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 3 (S 1986): 257-263.

²³⁸ Stephen B. Dawes, “Numbers 12.3: What Was Special About Moses?,” 336-340.

most English translations: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?”

However, considering the placement of the passage that happens right after the seventh plague to show the LORD’s might, the request from the LORD to Pharaoh to be “עֲנֶה” seems to be more like a threatening statement happening in a military battle. Thus, the reader does not have any difficulty in substituting the word “humble” with “to be subdued” as used once in the language of Delilah, “How could you be bound, so that one could subdue (עֲנֶה) you?” (Judg. 16:5).

עֲנִי as an adjective is used seven times in the Pentateuch (Ex 22:24; Lev 19:10; 23:22; Deut 15:11; 24:12, 14-15) and every word is translated as “poor,” which means those who have trouble in finding means of surviving. עֲנִי as a noun occurs nine times in the Pentateuch (Gen 6:11; 29:32; 31:42; 41:52; Ex. 3:7, 17; 4:31; Deut. 16:3; 26:7). It is translated as either “affliction,” “misfortune (Gen. 41:52),” “suffering (Ex. 3:7),” or “misery (Ex. 3:17; 4:31).” Nowhere in the Pentateuch does both עֲנִי as adjective and noun give any sense of personal virtue. They always refer to the marginalized people or the condition they have to experience.

עֲנוּהָ as a noun, translated by many English Bibles as “humility,” appears seven times in the Hebrew Bible and it is hard to negate that עֲנוּהָ means some sort of virtue. In Proverbs, it is something that would cause personal glory (Prov. 15:33; 18:12; 22:4). In two places, it is a quality of God (2 Sam. 22:36; Psa. 18:36) that brings salvation to David.²³⁹ In Zephaniah 2:3, the writer encourages Israel to seek “humility (עֲנוּהָ)” to avoid

²³⁹ NRSV has trouble to apply the idea of “humility” to GOD. So, it awkwardly translates it “help.” In KJV, it is translated as “generosity.”

the judgment of the LORD. However, this kind of idea of ענה as a virtue never occurs in the Pentateuch.

ענו occurs twenty-five times in the Hebrew Bible and without exception, they are all masculine. In nineteen cases, it takes a form of עֲנִיִּים as an adjective plural to mean the socially underprivileged people, often translated as “the meek,” “the humble,” or “the poor.” In five cases, it takes the form of עֲנִי as an adjective plural construct to mean “the poor.” Again, the root mostly captures the negative idea of socially marginalized people. Even when it is translated “the humble,” it is hard to say clearly that it means a group of people who together hold the virtue of humility. More importantly for the purpose of this discussion, these words never occur in the Pentateuch except Numbers 12:3. In this particular verse, ענו appears as a singular adjective, which is unique.

Careful analysis of the use of the root ענה and its synonyms in the Hebrew Bible in general and in the Pentateuch in specific provides some insight: The writers of the Pentateuch did not have any interest in promoting “humility” as a virtue. Then, it is hard to accept the notion that the writer (s) of Numbers suddenly took the idea of humility as a virtue and tried to promote it through the example of Moses. Even though all the English translations of the passage readily translate it “humble” or “meek” and most commentators state that it refers to Moses’ humility as a virtue, if this idea of humility happens only once in the middle of the Pentateuch and never happens again till the last chapter of Deuteronomy, one must think again. Something is not right in this picture of Moses as “the most humble man” presented in the Pentateuch even though the root ענה is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to mean “humble/humility.” It is inconsistent with

the flow of the use of the root in the Pentateuch.

Rogers' insight that Numbers 12:3 might be the right assessment of Moses' situation is helpful to reconstruct the original intention of the passage.²⁴⁰ In chapter 11, the people begin to complain and the LORD is so angry that the fire of the LORD consumes some outlying parts of the camp. Then it is Moses who hears the "crying" of the people. Sandwiched between the people and the LORD, Moses prays to the LORD and the fire abates.

The chapter continues to draw the picture of the people complaining. "The rabble among them had a strong craving" for meat (11:4). They begin to recall the "good old days in Egypt" and weep. They say that they are sick of manna. "Moses heard the people weeping" and the LORD becomes very angry (11:10). Now, out of disappointment, Moses also begins complaining to the LORD. "Why have you treated your servant so badly?...You lay the burden of all this people on me (11:11)." And Moses asks a profound question: "Did I conceive all these people?" In other words, Moses does not find a good reason why he should take care of these rebellious people and hear all their complaints in the middle of the desert. He is frustrated and stressed. Thus, he challenges the LORD with the question. Even this passage alone does not support the idea that Moses was the "most humble man."

The LORD's resolution is rather rhetorically humorous. The LORD will give the people meat "until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you." But not only does the LORD provide meat but also kills some people. Again, the scene pictures

²⁴⁰ Rogers, 261-262.

Moses sandwiched between the people and the LORD.

As chapter 12 begins, there is another case of complaining. It comes out of Moses' brother and sister. They challenge their brother because Moses has married a Cushite woman. Their challenge to his leadership is harsh, cold, and doubtful. "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses" (12:2)? All the stories of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12 lead the readers to one conclusion: Moses is a lonely leader. Even his own family members show some form of rejection of his leadership. Then the next verse says, "וְהָאִישׁ כּוֹשֵׁה עֵגְוִן [עֲנִיּוֹן] קָאֵר". Rogers, thus, concludes that the right English word in the context for the term עֵגְוִן is "miserable."²⁴¹

Rogers' suggestion is attractive considering the context. However, since the Torah uses the root ענה to mean "to be afflicted" most often, Rogers' literary creativeness seems to be an overstatement. After being challenged twice by his own people whom he has brought out of Egypt, and observing the LORD who is not cooperating, Moses must feel bad. On top of that, his leadership is rejected by his own family members who are supposed to encourage him when he is in difficult situations. Furthermore, Noth pays attention to the unusual phrase "the man Moses,"²⁴² that appears just before the description of Moses, which can be translated "As a man Moses." He thinks that this expression is to bring out the humanity of Moses. Then, what would be the best

²⁴¹ Rogers, 262.

²⁴² Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, trans. James D. Martin, of *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 95; Daws, "Numbers 12.3: What Was Special About Moses?", 336.

description of the situation of Moses? Affliction in a negative sense would be the one.^{101 243}

Considering the use of the root ענה in the Torah and other passages in the Hebrew Bible, the picture of Moses as a humble man in a virtuous manner should be reconsidered. The Torah does not seem to understand the virtue of humility fully, and in that point it has a different notion of ענה than the Prophets and Writings: In the Torah, the root always refers to something negative. Therefore, even though Moses is a hero for both Judaism and Christianity, it is not correct to project today's idea of the virtue of humility onto the description of Moses in Numbers 12:3. If נָחַם is to mean "humble" as a virtue in any case, the only way to explain the validity of the translation is to say that Numbers 12:3 is a later addition to the original text²⁴⁴ by the editor (s) who understood the idea of "humility" as a virtue, attested mostly in the Prophets and Writings. However, even if the verse can be viewed as a later addition, it is clear that the image of Moses in the context is not intended by the original writer (s) to promote the virtue of humility.

CONCLUSION

It is observed that both humble/humility and honor/glory language appear more in Prophets and Writings than in the Torah and Deuteronomistic History. This gives one few insights to the study of the virtue of humility. First, even though it is hard to precisely

²⁴³ LXX translates the Hebrew term נָחַם into πρᾶϋς. The translators who knew the Greek world enough seem to know that using ταπεινός to refer to Moses' state can create many perplexities. In the Greek culture, ταπεινός had not been used to mean something good. Simply, it hardly conveys the meaning of a virtue. A person like Moses should not be described by ταπεινός, specifically because he is the number one of the world in that quality. The translator's choice was πρᾶϋς. However, the adjective πρᾶϋς occurs sixteen times in the Hebrew Bible and only once in the Torah, in Numbers 12:3.

²⁴⁴ Noth, 95; Dawes, "Numbers 12.3: What Was Special About Moses?," 336.

date the books in the Hebrew Bible, it is not difficult to postulate that the idea of humility as a virtue appears to be a later theological outcome of the meditations on the experiences of personal and national suffering. Second, the idea of humility as a virtue is not as strongly supported by the Mosaic code as many would think. Considering the use of the humble/humility language used in the Torah, which mostly refers to negative human experiences, it is not only unfair but also inconsistent with the flow of the text if one raises Moses as an example of humility based on Numbers 12:3. This points out that the idea of humility as a virtue may exist in Judaism, but only as a minor opinion. Even though the Prophets and the Writings promote the idea elsewhere, as long as it is not specified and supported by the Torah, it is fragile. No wonder, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law do not seem to be bothered by taking the seat of honor in the gospels (Matthew 23:12, Luke 14:11). Third, where the language of humble/humility abounds, the language of honor/glory abounds also. This seems to suggest that the language of humble/humility has much to do with socio-economic conditions, even though it is hard to deny that the language of humble/humility refers to a spiritual disposition elsewhere.

HUMILITY IN GREEK WRITERS: FROM THE EIGHTH CENTURY BCE TO THE TIME OF JESUS

There are a number of ways to study the meaning of humility in the Greek Culture. Many lexicons employ the method of categorizing by finding differences of the word in meaning and supporting the meaning out of the Greek literature. It helps to know a variety of definitions of words. However, it does not indicate anything about historical development of the idea. In answer to this problem, this chapter approaches the study of humility historically, beginning from the eighth century BCE. The main purpose of this chapter is to see what would be the general idea that the ancient Greek-speaking people would come up with when they heard the word *ταπεινός* and its cognates in their language. Furthermore, this study will try to see if humility would ever come to the Greek mind as a virtue.

THE EARLY USES OF *ταπεινός*

A great deal of Greek literature was created by the writers of the eighth century BCE: Homer, Antimachus, Eumelus, Hesiod, Aethiopis, Cypria, Epigone, Ilias Parva, Iliou Persis, Oedipodea, Titanomachy, and Oechaliae Halosis. Among the known works of the Greek authors, mostly epics, none of them include *ταπεινός* or any of its cognates. This might be a disappointing discovery for studying the historical traces of the idea of

humility; however, it provides a valuable insight. Even though not many works from the eighth century have survived, it is still hard to accept that none of them leave even a hint of how those ancient authors used the idea of humility represented by the language of *ταπεινός*. The Iliad and the Odyssey deal with many of the ancient moral issues and personalities that could be described by using the idea of “humble” that is defined by the writers of the seventh century. But Homer never uses *ταπεινός* or any of its cognates in his writing, which is too interesting to be ignored. Furthermore, considering that the Iliad and the Odyssey were two of the most important works of ancient Greek literature that educated the children of antiquity, the lack of *ταπεινός* or any of its cognates in the eighth century literature seems to suggest that *ταπεινός* was not a popular idea in that era, even though this might be an oversimplified observation.

It is in the seventh century literature where one begins to observe any trace of the use of the cognates of *ταπεινός*. One of the earliest uses of *ταπεινός* and its cognates is found in Septem Sapientes’ *Apophthegmata* in the seventh to the sixth century BCE, known to be the *Sayings of the Seven Sages*. One of the passages supposedly spoken by Aesop in answer to Chilon’s theological question is this:

Φασὶ δ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ Αἰσωπον πυθέσθαι, ὃ Ζεὺς τί εἴη ποιῶν, τὸν δὲ φάναι· τὰ μὲν ὑψηλὰ ταπεινοῦν, τὰ δὲ ταπεινὰ ὑψοῦν.²⁴⁵

Chilon: What is Zeus doing?

Aesop: He is humbling the proud and exalting the humble.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Septem Sapientes, *Apophthegmata*, Division 3 Apophthegm, 11.3.

²⁴⁶ Translation from Hermann Diels, and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker, Griechisch Und Deutsch*, 6. verb. Aufl ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951), 63-66.

This saying of Aesop shows a surprising resemblance to Psalm 18:27: You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty (ὅτι σὺ λαὸν ταπεινὸν σωσεις καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑπερηφάνων ταπεινώσεις, Psalm 17:28, LXX). Proverbs 3:14 contains the same kind of idea: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”²⁴⁷ Sirach 7:11 also presents the same idea: “Do not ridicule a person who is embittered in spirit, for there is One who humbles and exalts.” Another biblical parallel is found in the saying of Jesus presented in Matthew 23:12 and Luke 14:11: “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.” It seems that Matthew and Luke do not involve the function of God, in place of Zeus, in the business of reversing fates, so that it might seem to be a natural happening. Nevertheless, it is also possible to view this passage as their simple assumption that the reader would think it to be divine justice without seeing the name of a deity in the passage since this reversal of fate is widely known to the ancient people.

In the saying of Aesop, however, it is not clear if “being humble” refers to a virtue. Both being proud and being humble are not under the moral evaluation in his saying. Rather, it seems to emphasize the divine power of Zeus who can change one’s fate anytime just like flipping a pancake. This idea seems to be well adopted in the Greek culture, as seen in a number of Greek tragedies where gods play important roles to change the course of human lives, whether they are righteous or not, and humans cannot even question the sovereignty of Zeus but simply accept what Zeus does as their unavoidable fate.

²⁴⁷ This passage is used in James 4:4 and 1 Peter 5:5.

It is hard to think that Aesop's "being humble" refers to a socially positive attitude called "virtue" when reflected upon the saying of Cleobulus, another one of the Seven Sages. He says, "εὐποροῦντα μὴ ὑπερήφανον εἶναι, ἀποροῦντα μὴ ταπεινοῦσθαι." It can be translated respectfully, "When you are rich, do not be arrogant; when you are poor, do not humble yourself."²⁴⁸ Being rich or poor is not a matter of ethics, but the attitude of the haves or have-nots is. And Cleobulus' recommendation is that the rich should not be arrogant and the poor should not be humble because being neither arrogant nor humble is a socially acceptable attitude.

Greek literature, after the sixth century BCE, shows more usages of the idea of ταπεινός. However, generally speaking, no example is found that speaks to the idea of ταπεινός as a virtue. Rather, a careful reading of the Greek texts shows that the idea of ταπεινός is pictured in a very negative way. At best, it might be an honest description of one's miserable status.

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* suggests that the etymological derivation of ταπεινός must be from "being low."²⁴⁹ It can be easily supported by a number of Greek texts of the sixth century. In the *Nemean Odes*, Pindar uses ταπεινὰ to signify the flight range of the chattering jackdaws, contrasted with the high flying eagle.²⁵⁰ Herodotus in the fifth century also uses ταπεινός to mean "low" in a physical

²⁴⁸ See Friedrich Wilhelm August Mullach, *Fragmenta Philosophorum Graecorum* (Aalen: Scientia, 1968), 217-218.

²⁴⁹ Gerhard Kittel, et al., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 2. Henceforth, TDNT.

²⁵⁰ Pindar, and John Edwin Sandys, "Nemean Odes," in *The Odes of Pindar: Including the Principal Fragments, The Loeb Classical Library 56* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 3.80-84.

sense. In book 4 section 22 line 9 of his *History*, Herodotus describes the people called Iyrkae: “Each man has his horse at hand, trained to couch upon its belly for lowliness’ (ταπεινότητος) sake.”²⁵¹ Again in the same book, section 191, Herodotus describes the land of the eastern region of Libya as low-lying (ταπεινή) and sandy as far as the river Triton. This landscape is contrasted with the land westward that is exceeding hilly (4.191.11).

Physical lowness surely seems to be a popular use of *ταπεινός* among the ancient writers around the fifth century BCE also. Empedocles, in *Testimonia*, fragment 35, speaks: “Earth moves aloft and fire is lower down (ταπεινότερον).” In fragment 58, Empedocles also says, “The northern parts were raised, the southern parts lowered (ταπεινωθήναι); accordingly the entire cosmos [inclined].”²⁵² Empedocles’ use of *ταπεινός* is consistent. In fragment 82, he explains why mules are sterile. “It is because of the smallness, lowness, and narrowness of the womb.”²⁵³ Anaxagoras also uses the term to mean physical lowness. In his *Testimonia*, he teaches about the moon: “The moon is unevenly composed, because it is at the same time earthy and mixed with cold; it has heights, lowlands (ταπεινά), and hollows.”²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Translation from A. D. Godley, *Herodotus, With an English Translation*, vol. 2 in *Loeb Classical Library* (London: W. Heinemann, 1921), 221.

²⁵² Brad Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles: A Text and Translation With an Introduction* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 174.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁵⁴ Anaxagoras, *Fragments and Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Patricia Curd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 112.

THE SIXTH CENTURY BCE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Looking at the uses of *ταπεινός* and its cognates in the Greek tragedies is important specifically because they are written for public performance. Unlike the political forums of the city, most civic festivals were open to everyone--men, women, slaves, children, resident aliens, etc., except the festivals associated with Demeter.²⁵⁵ Those festivals certainly involved dramas as one of the highlights of the festivals. This public nature of dramas is well shown in Plato's saying, "Agathon's victory in the tragic competition was gained 'in the eyes of more than thirty thousand Greeks.'"²⁵⁶ Some Greek theaters in ancient times, like the one at Epidauros, could hold an audience of fourteen thousand. Arontt says, "for a festival held there recently, when several ancient tragedies were revived, these numbers were increased to twenty thousand."²⁵⁷

ταπεινός is found in *Prometheus Vincit* (6-5 BCE) in line 320. In this Greek drama attributed to Aeschylus, Oceanus appears in the scene to converse with chain-bound Prometheus, punished by Zeus for giving fire to human beings. Prometheus is cynical although Oceanus tries to help. In response to Prometheus' self-ridiculing words and his anger toward Zeus, Oceanus suggests, "Learn to know thyself, put on the habit of new ways, for there is a new tyrant among the gods."²⁵⁸ Oceanus continues to say that

²⁵⁵ Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, in *Theatre Production Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 5-6.

²⁵⁶ Plato, *Symposium*, 175.e. Translation from *Plato, with an English Translation*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 93. This number may be an exaggeration. See Simon Goldhill, "The Audience of Athenian Tragedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 58.

²⁵⁷ Peter D. Arnott, *An Introduction to the Greek Theatre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 34.

²⁵⁸ Translation from Whitney Jennings Oates, et al., *The Complete Greek Drama; All the Extant Tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the Comedies of Aristophanes and Menander, in a Variety of Translations* (New York: Random House, 1938), 136.

Prometheus' suffering is caused by his arrogant tongue (ἄγαν ὑψηγόρου γλώσσης).

However, since Prometheus does not listen to him, Oceanus tells him, “σὺ δ’ ουδέπω ταπεινός.”

What Oceanus sees from the misery of Prometheus is his attitude toward the higher authority, Zeus. He is angry at Zeus and sarcastic about his life and the words of his friends. Oceanus' prescription to Prometheus to get out of that misery is to know the reality of his presence in the context of a new divine politics: Zeus is the ruler and Prometheus has no power to go against him. What Prometheus needs is to give up his anger and accept the new way of the world. This new attitude is well summarized in the word ταπεινός in Oceanus' speech. A number of scholars translate the sentence, thus, “You are not humble yet” or something very similar to it.²⁵⁹

James Scully and C. J. Herington translate the sentence slightly differently: “You don't keep your profile low enough.” Clearly, it is a recommendation to Prometheus, who is described in the previous sentence, “The braggart gets more than he bargained for.” (319). Here the word ταπεινός is used to mean something that “braggart” does not.²⁶⁰ It is not likely, however, that the use of ταπεινός in Aeschylus refers to a virtuous act. If ταπεινός is to be a virtue, it should be a virtue of the low and underprivileged people in front of the powerful, only to spare their life by trying to squeeze out pity from

²⁵⁹ See L. R. Lind, *Ten Greek Plays in Contemporary Translations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 14; James M. Pryse, *A New Presentation of the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus Wherein is Set Forth the Hidden Meaning of the Myth*, trans. James Morgan Pryse (Los Angeles: 1925), 31; Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. Anthony J. Podlecki (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 2005), 99; David Green, and Richmond Alexander Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, vol. 1, trans. Richmond Lattimore, and David Grene, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 214; Aeschylus, *Aeschylus 2*, trans. William Matthews, Penn Greek Drama Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 168.

²⁶⁰ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. James Scully, and C. J. Herington (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 44-45.

those who can decide their fate. However, it is far from the Greek ideal. From the perspective of the intelligent or powerful, it is an attitude they never want to have, even at the time of facing death. For a god like Prometheus, it is a more than enough reason why he could not be “humble” even though his antagonist is the powerful Zeus.

Later in line 908, Aeschylus uses *ταπεινός* again in response to the chorus. In a language of prophesy, Prometheus relates that one day Zeus will be humbled (*ταπεινός*). Even though he does not explain what he exactly means by that, he offers some words that allow the reader to have some imaginary space to guess what the experience of “being humbled” might mean. According to Prometheus, “Zeus being humbled” is a curse originally made by Kronus, deposed by Zeus, with a new marriage to begin the process. The new son of Zeus would be stronger than Zeus and this son would do what Zeus did to his father Kronus; then the prophecy of Prometheus would be fulfilled. To Prometheus, being humble is to be ashamed, just like Kronus was once and now is.

Andromache, a tragedy attributed to Euripides, uses the term very negatively. Orestes, after killing Neoptolemus, tells Hermione, “I was humbled (*ταπεινός*)” (line 979).²⁶¹ This event is something he had to grieve (*ἤλγουν*). He had to endure calamities and was robbed of marriage. As in the case of Aeschylus, Euripides uses the term in as deep a connection to suffering as one can expect from the genre “tragedy.”

Hecuba of Euripides witnesses the use of *ταπεινός* as a lowly attitude. The scene opens with Odysseus’ entering the place where Hecuba, the mother of Hector, is. The sole purpose of Odysseus’ coming is to get her daughter Polyxena for sacrifice on the

²⁶¹ Euripides, *Andromache*, 979.

high mound of Achilles' tomb. Hecuba, already in a sorrowful life after the fall of Troy, tries to save her daughter from the hand of the Achaeans. She reminds Odysseus of the mercy Hecuba offered to him when he was coming to Troy as a spy. Odysseus was in rags and tatters, bleeding, and Hecuba happened to recognize him. Then in Hecuba's question toward Odysseus, she reveals the attitude of Odysseus to save his life: "Didst thou embrace my knees in all humility (ταπεινός, line 245)?²⁶² This question again has the insight that ταπεινός is an attitude that may cause, in the mind of the powerful, mercy and pity. It might also refer to the attitude of an opportunist or coward. Hecuba continues: "So tell me what you said then, when you were my slave." "All the arguments I could think up. I wanted to survive," Odysseus replies.

Euripides' *Hercules Furens* agrees with the estimation of ταπεινός in *Hecuba*. Hercules, after killing his wife and three sons in a fit of unwanted madness, finds out what he has done to his loved ones and tries to commit suicide in extreme grief. Then Theseus, whom Hercules brought back from Hades, appears on the scene and tries to persuade him to live. However, in conversation with him, Hercules shows the opposite of the Greek ideal. He wants to see his dead sons one more time in tears and hug his father Amphytrion before leaving his house. Seeing his emotional weakness, Theseus rebukes him: "If someone sees your weakness, he will not praise you" (line 1412). Then Hercules responds in the form of question: "I live: am I so low (ταπεινός)? You did not think so

²⁶² Translation from Whitney Jennings Oates, et al. 812. See also Euripides, *Hecuba; the Trojan Women; Andromache* trans. James Morwood (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.

once.”²⁶³ Obviously, the state of Hercules’ living expressed in the word *ταπεινός* is something a hero like Hercules should not have. It is something people would not praise. This understanding is confirmed by Theseus’ retort: Where now is famous Heracles?

In Euripides’ *The Trojan Women*, there is a scene where Helen, the cause of the Trojan war, is accused of the whole tragedy of both Greeks and Trojans by Hecuba, the mother of Paris, the one who abducted Helen. Hecuba’s accusation is cold and fierce. “You say that my son took you off by force. Which of the Spartans witnessed this (lines 998-999)?” ²⁶⁴ “You had no wish to keep company with virtue (line 1009).” “After all this you have come out here in your fine attire and you have breathed the same air as your husband, you hateful creature. You should have come humbly (*ταπεινήν*)²⁶⁵ in rags, shuddering fear, your head shaved bare, showing a sense of shame over your former sins rather than this impudent flaunting (lines 1024-1028).”

In these sayings, what bothers Hecuba is the entering of Helen into the scene in a splendid dress. Thus, by *ταπεινήν*, Hecuba means the opposite state of being in the splendid dress. It also is noticeable that Euripides uses *ταπεινήν* in conjunction with some profanity like “shuddering fear,” “shaved bare head,” and “shame.” The attitude of

²⁶³ Theodore Alois Buckley, *The Tragedies of Euripides, Literally Trans. Or Rev., With Critical and Explanatory Notes* (London: G. Bell, 1890), 39. The translation of this passage is argumentative. Bond suggests that it would mean “By living humbled am I adding more troubles to my labors, in your opinion?” See Euripides, *Heracles* trans. Godfrey W. Bond (Oxford New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1981), 412. Note that the basic meaning of the word *ταπεινός* does not change even though translations of the sentence may vary.

²⁶⁴ Euripides, *Hecuba; the Trojan Women; Andromache*, trans. James Morwood (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 66.

²⁶⁵ “You had best come a beggar...” See Euripides, *The Complete Plays*, vol. 1. 1st ed. trans. Carl Richard Mueller (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2005), 79. “You would have done better to come crawling through the dust...” See Euripides, *The Trojan Women; Helen; the Bacchae*, in *Translations from Greek and Roman Authors*, trans. Neil Curry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 41. “More fitting had you appeared in filthy rags...” See Euripides, *Trojan Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66.

ταπεινήν is not something to be praised as a virtue but as the attitude of a person full of shame, facing a grave punishment. Hecuba continues, “Kill this woman. Set up this law for the rest of the female sex, that whoever betrays her husband must die” (lines 1031-1032).

Euripides also uses ταπεινός to depict the manner of suppliants to a higher authority through the words of a Phrygian slave in *Orestes*. Electra, Orestes, and Pylades plan to kill Helen, the troublemaker. Somehow Orestes and Pylades can get into the palace of Helen who was enjoying the prestige of being a queen after returning to Sparta although Euripides blames her for the Trojan war elsewhere. Orestes and Pylades succeed in isolating Helen from her servants while they pretend to come as suppliants. And according to the Phrygian slave, they sat lowly (ταπεῖν, Line 1412). In this posture, “Their eyes marred with tears.”²⁶⁶ Moreover, “They threw suppliant arms, threw them around the knees of Helen” (line 1413-1414).²⁶⁷

One perplexing use of ταπεινός in Euripides’ language is found in *Iphigeneia at Aulis*. The opening scene prepares the audience that Kalchas the prophet, Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Menelaos have decided to sacrifice Iphigeneia, Agamemnon’s daughter, to Artemis to cause wind for their campaign. Agamemnon has written a letter to his wife to send her daughter to Aulis by telling the lie that it is for a marriage for her to Achilles. However, being the father of Iphigeneia, Agamemnon finally writes a second letter to cancel the first and sends it via his old servant. Then, Menelaus appears on the scene and

²⁶⁶ Translation from Euripides, *Ion; Orestes; Phoenician Women; Suppliant Women*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 87.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 87.

steals the letter from the hand of the old servant. Eventually he comes to know what is going on. Hearing the noise, Agamemnon enters the scene and they begin quarreling.

Agamemnon tries to dissemble at first, but when he discovers that Menelaos knows everything, he blusteringly tells him not to meddle. Sensing his original plan to sacrifice Iphigeneia is jeopardized, Menelaos begins to criticize his brother Agamemnon. The chief accusation is that he is treacherous. According to Menelaos, Agamemnon is ambitious to be the leader of the Greeks against Troy. However, on the way to leadership, Agamemnon seemed to be ταπεινός (line 339). Of this expression, there exist various translations. Arthur S. Way translates, “How to all men wast thou lowly...”²⁶⁸ Don Taylor translates it, “How very self-deprecating you were.”²⁶⁹ W. W. Merwin and George E. Dimock Jr. translate it, “You know how you humbled yourself at the time.”²⁷⁰ Nicholas Rudall translates it, “And to get it you groveled.”²⁷¹ Finally, Carl R. Mueller translates the same sentence, “How humble you presented yourself.”²⁷²

Considering the consistent use of ταπεινός and its cognates in the Euripides’ plays to mean something very abject and cowardly, those translators who use the English word “humble” seem to be careless, since “humble” might refer in today’s English to a virtuous gesture of a person. Menelaos’ argument also suggests that Agamemnon’s being ταπεινός is not because of his noble nature. He touched hands with others and opened

²⁶⁸ Arthur Sanders Way, *Euripides, With an English Translation* (London: W. Heinemann, 1912), 35.

²⁶⁹ Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, trans. Don Taylor (London: Methuen Drama, 2004), 13.

²⁷⁰ Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, trans. W. W. Merwin and George E. Dimock Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 37.

²⁷¹ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, trans. Nicholas Rudall, *Plays for Performance* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 20.

²⁷² *The Complete Plays*, 244.

his house to everyone just to be popular among the Greeks. It was a political trick to gain leadership over the people. And to Menelaos, this “being ταπεινός” of Agamemnon is his disgusting, deceiving, and opportunistic act. To prove it, Menelaos says that, once Agamemnon was chosen to command, he betrayed everyone. “You dropped the friends you didn’t need anymore. It was hard to get to talk with you, you shut yourself in (lines 343-345).” Therefore, the proper translation of the sentence would be, “You know how you were disgustingly opportunistic.”

THE FIFTH CENTURY BCE WRITERS

In book 7 section 14, Herodotus introduces how the king of Persia, Xerxes, comes to march upon Greece for battle. Of course, it was not a simple decision. Under his leadership, there are two parties: one for battle and the other for peace. Torn between the two opinions, Xerxes was haunted by a vision in his sleep that urges him to war. Then the voice in the vision says, “If you (Xerxes) do not lead your army to battle, it will make you great and mighty a little while, but in a moment you will be brought low (ταπεινός) again (7.14.7).” In this passage, ταπεινός seems to be the opposite of “great and mighty” in a political sense.

Among the early Greek thinkers in the fifth century, Isocrates is the one of those who uses the term ταπεινός and its cognates most often. In his known works, they are used thirty three times,²⁷³ and most of them refer to a “small, mean, low, and poor” state

²⁷³ *De Bigis* 33.5; *Trapeziticus* 22.4; *Ad Demonicum* 10.1; *Helenae encomium* 13.6 and 59.4; *Panegyricus* 8.3, 68.4, 95.3, 118.5, 141.5, 151.7, 152.5; *Plataicus* 37.7; *Ad Nicoclem* 34.5; *Nicoles* 42.3; etc.

of a thing or person. *De Bigis* (The Team of Horses) is written to defend Alcibiades in an action for damage for the sum of five talents. The attorney is the son of Alcibiades who shares the same name with his father. In this passage of his speech, the younger Alcibiades points out how the festival assembly at Olympia is admired by the whole world and how the renowned athletes are respected. However, he also points out that some of the athletes were of low birth (κακῶς γεγόνοτας), inhabitants of petty states (μικρὰς πόλεις οἰκοῦντας), and of mean education (ταπεινῶς πεπαιδευμένους).²⁷⁴ Since the two words (κακῶς and μικρὰς) that precede ταπεινῶς are juxtaposed as negative aspects of the background of those athletes, it is better to understand ταπεινῶς as a negative term that gives Alcibiades one of the reasons why he disdained (ὑπερεῖδεν) the gymnastic contests.

Isocrates' *Trapeziticus* also offers a nice example of what the state of ταπεινός would mean. *Trapeziticus* or "Speech Pertaining to the Banker" was written by Isocrates for a young man who accuses the banker Pasion of abusing his money. The young man says, "At that time, he was in a humble (ταπεινός) mood." (22.4) The following phrases are descriptions of that mood: "For not only was he in a state of fear in regard to the torture and the impending suit... And being embarrassed and finding no other means of relief, he bribed the slaves of the alien Pyron and falsified the memorandum." This long explanation of the "humble mood" lets the reader make no mistake in understanding ταπεινός. As in the case of Euripides, it is a state of a person who would do anything,

²⁷⁴ Isocrates, *Isocrates*, trans. Larue van Hook (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 195.

even though it may be immoral and embarrassing, just to survive or get through an impending danger.

Isocrates also provides an example how a nation can be viewed as ταπεινός.

Panegyricus is known to be the first of the discourses of Isocrates and in this, he insists on the union of the Greek states against all barbarians including the Persian empire. Here, he reminds the Greek people of the experience they had while Hellas was still humble (ταπεινῆς, 68.3). In this time, they experienced attacks by the Thracians, led by Emulous, son of Poseidon, and by the Scything, led by the Amazons, the daughters of Ares.²⁷⁵ Thus, considering the textual context, it seems that ταπεινῆς might mean “insignificant, feeble, or powerless” in an international relationship. The same understanding is repeated in section 141, 151, and 152.

Evagoras died in 374 BCE and was succeeded by his son Nicocles who happened to be a student of Isocrates. *Ad Nicoclem* is a compendium of political advice to this young ruler from his teacher. Here in section 37, he says, “Those who affect dignity are cold, while those who desire to be courteous appear to lower (ταπεινοῦς) themselves.”²⁷⁶ Isocrates recommends that Nicocles should cultivate both these forms (ιδέαις): dignity and courtesy. However, these forms come with dangers that a ruler should avoid: Being cold and being humble. So, even though one tries to be friendly to many people, one should not be humble, which is a lowly attitude. Obviously, this saying is opposite to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:4. “Whoever becomes humble (ταπεινώσει) like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

²⁷⁵ Isocrates, *Ad Nicoclem*, trans. George Norlin (London: W. Heinemann, Ltd., 1928), 159.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 58-61.

ταπεινός and its cognates occur twenty-one times in the known works of

Xenophon and most of them are used negatively, like other Greek writers of his day. In *Memorabilia*, which records the sayings of Socrates, Xenophon, through the mouth of Socrates in a conversation with Parrhasius, a famous painter of 5th century BCE, connects τὸ ταπεινόν (the humble) to ἀνελεύθερον (attitude of a slave) (3.10.5.2):

Socrates: Do you think that the joys and sorrows of their friends produce the same expression on men's faces, whether they really care or not?

Parrhasius: Oh no, of course not: they look radiant at their joys, downcast at their sorrows.

Socrates: Then is it possible to represent these looks too?

Parrhasius: Undoubtedly.

Socrates: Moreover, nobility and dignity, self-abasement (τὸ ταπεινόν) and servility (ἀνελεύθερον), prudence and understanding, insolence and vulgarity, are reflected in the face and in the attitudes of the body whether still or in motion.

Parrhasius: True.²⁷⁷

Those eight qualities of a human being expressed through the body-- nobility, dignity, self-abasement, servility, prudence, understanding, insolence, and vulgarity-- are listed in a special way. In the saying of Socrates, Xenophon pairs two similar moral qualities together and lists them in a linear pattern of a pair of positive qualities and a pair of negative next to each other. Taking this literary form, there is no doubt that as nobility is revered as dignity and prudence as understanding in the language of Socrates, self-abasement (τὸ ταπεινόν) is detested as servility and insolence as vulgarity.

Xenophon's Socrates seems to be in line with Aesop in understanding how gods work with people: "Perhaps some divinity orders it thus, who wishes to humble (ταπεινῶσαι) those who spoke boastfully, as if they were superior to us in wisdom, and to

²⁷⁷ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3. 10. 5. 2, trans. E. C. Marchant, in *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961), 233-235.

render us, who commence all our proceedings by consulting the gods, more honored than they are.²⁷⁸ It is clear in this case that ταπεινῶσαι is used negatively. It is a divine punishment brought to the boastful.

Cyropaedia is a fictional biography of Cyrus written by Xenophon that deals with the education and life of Cyrus. In book 3, there is an interesting conversation between Cyrus the king and Chrysantas, the Persian. In due course, Cyrus tells Chrysantas about the effect of law: “It gives the life of freedom and honor to the good, but a life of humiliation (ταπεινός) and misery should be imposed to the bad.” The most amazing insight one can get from the sayings of Cyrus is the evaluation of the life of humiliation and misery. He coldly says, “It is not worth living.”²⁷⁹

In *Hiero*, Xenophon provides another important image of being ταπεινός in a conversation between Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse, and the lyric poet Simonides. Hiero, being a despot, explains how despots would rule their people. They would not find any pleasure in seeing that the citizens are “stout-hearted and well armed.”²⁸⁰ Hiero then continues, “He (a despot) delights to make the foreigners more formidable than the citizens.” The political cruelty of a despot culminates in this: “When favorable seasons yield abundance of good things, the despot is a stranger to the general joy; for the needier the people, the humbler (ταπεινοτέροις) he thinks to find them.” Strauss’ translation is

²⁷⁸ Xenophon, *The Anabasis; Or, Expedition of Cyrus*, trans. J. S. Watson (Boston: W. Small, 1893), 6.3.18.

²⁷⁹ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 3.3.52.

²⁸⁰ Xenophon, *Hiero*, 5.4. Translation from *Xenophon, in Seven Volumes*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961), 31.

better to catch the flavor of the sentence, “tyrants think that as men are more in want, they are more submissive (ταπεινοτέροις) for being used.”²⁸¹

What one can observe from *Hiero* is that the attitude of ταπεινός of people, which obviously is interconnected to the life of the needy, is now viewed from a political perspective. For a despot, the attitude of ταπεινός that the poor have is good because it would be easier to rule over them. The attitude of the ταπεινός is the opposite of the attitude of the free because the free may make their own decision for their destiny, go against the despots, and eventually become masters of them.²⁸²

Among the Greek literature from the eighth century to the fifth century BCE, which includes ninety-three occurrences of ταπεινός and its cognates, Xenophon is the first one who sees ταπεινότερος in a positive way. *Agesilaus* is a short writing that summarizes the life of a Spartan king named Agesilaus who is an ideal ruler in Xenophon’s eyes. It is full of praises of the character and virtuous behavior of Agesilaus. In chapter 11 Xenophon describes one of Agesilaus’ virtues (ἀρετήν)²⁸³: “He was never arrogant (ὑβρεῖ)... He was humbler (ταπεινότερος) than the average man.”²⁸⁴ Evidence of his humility is shown, Xenophon says, in his simplicity (φαυλότης) of his own dress.²⁸⁵ Since the whole writing is dedicated to the virtuous Agesilaus, it is hard to deny that ταπεινότερος refers to a positive quality of the king. Thus, Xenophon shows that

²⁸¹ Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 12.

²⁸² Xenophon, *Hiero*, 5.2.

²⁸³ Xenophon, *Agesilaus*, 11.1.1.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.11.4

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.11.5

even if it might not be popular, ταπεινός can convey a positive meaning depending on the context.

De Republica Lacedaemoniorum might be another candidate to show the positive use of humility in Xenophon's writings. In this, Xenophon, admiring the Spartan way of life, mentions:

“In other states the most powerful citizens do not even wish it to be thought that they fear the magistrates: they believe such fear to be a badge of slavery. But at Sparta the most important men show the utmost deference to the magistrates: they pride themselves on their humility (ταπεινοὶ), on running instead of walking to answer any call, in the belief that, if they lead, the rest will follow along the path of eager obedience.”²⁸⁶

The Spartan definition of, or outward sign of, humility (ταπεινοὶ) is to be quick to answer any call of higher authority in obedience so that it can be an example for the rest. It is opposite to what the most powerful citizens would do in other states. Of course, one cannot help but seeing that Xenophon's description of Spartan humility is an oxymoron in the modern sense since the Spartans take pride (μεγαλύνονται) in their humility (ταπεινοὶ). Nevertheless, the importance of this passage does not pale because Xenophon intrinsically provides an insight to how humility (ταπεινοὶ) could be used in an ancient social system like Sparta's as a positive attitude in conjunction with the idea of obedience that would benefit the state. In other states, like Athens, however, it might be disdained as a mark of slavery (νομίζουσι τοῦτο ἀνελεύθερον).

PLATO, ARISTOTLE, AND THE FOURTH CENTURY BCE WRITERS

²⁸⁶ Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, in *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 7, trans. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), viii.2.

Plato uses *ταπεινός* and its cognates thirteen times in his known works and basically agrees with the majority of Greek writers. In conversation with Theaetetus, Socrates states, “But if we find no escape from our perplexity, we shall, I fancy, become low-spirited (*ταπεινωθέντες*), like seasick people, and shall allow the argument to trample on us and do to us anything it pleases.”²⁸⁷ In Socrates’ discussion regarding knowledge, perplexity is something that leads one to being trampled by arguments. This statement does not give one much room to argue that “low-spirited” might refer to something of positive quality. This tendency of having a negative connotation in using *ταπεινός* and its cognates continues in *Politicus*.²⁸⁸

Compared to the Greek writers in the sixth or seventh century, however, Plato uses *ταπεινός* and its cognates in a positive way in more cases. Better put, it is not the meaning of those words Plato changes to use them positively. What he does is to create unique contexts in which they can be viewed in a positive way even though the meaning of those words stays the same. In the famous analogy of charioteer and horses in *Phaedrus*, Plato, through the character of Socrates, says that the human soul is like a charioteer driving a chariot pulled by two horses, which show parallels of the tripartite division of the Republic, 439b-441c. One is good and the other is bad. The charioteer represents intellect or reason. The good horse is the moral impulse and the bad horse is the soul’s irrational passions. Thus, Plato explains how a charioteer would train an unruly horse. He/she would cause the horse much pain, even to the point of making it bleed.

²⁸⁷ Plato, *Theaetetus*, in *Plato, With an English Translation*, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 191. a.

²⁸⁸ Plato, *Politicus*, 309a.5.

When this pain is repeated, finally the horse would give up its unruliness and become humble (ταπεινωθείς). The horse will concede that it is not in control of its destiny and it has no freedom against the will of the charioteer. Then it will follow the wisdom of the charioteer.²⁸⁹

Plato's use of ταπεινωθείς most likely refers to controllability in the eyes of the one who is in control. As humility is a political virtue for the poor in the eyes of a despot, as the discussion of Xenophon reveals,²⁹⁰ it is also good for an animal in the eyes of the charioteer. In a social system that consists of the high and low in classes and the powerful and weak in a political sense, being humble (ταπεινωθείς) could mean the absence of self or passion. It is a state of total passiveness. In the context where the bad horse should not be in control of his will or claim freewill, which will cause more pain and trouble in the eyes of the wise, the horse's being ταπεινωθείς is viewed as a virtue.

In *Leges*, Plato creates another context in which ταπεινός is viewed positively. In the conversation between Clinias and Athenians, the Athenians claim that god is the ruler of everything and he punishes those who forsake god's law. Knowing the power of god, "She (Justice), again, is followed by every man who would fain be happy, cleaving to her with lowly (ταπεινός) and orderly behaviour."²⁹¹ This use of ταπεινός is sharply contrasted with vainglory: "But whoso is uplifted by vainglory (μεγαλαυχίας), or prideth himself on his riches or his honours or his comeliness of body, and through this

²⁸⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254e.

²⁹⁰ Xenophon, *Hiero*, 5.4.

²⁹¹ Plato, *Leges*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. R. G. Bury, vol. 10 (Cambridge: MA, 1962), Book IV. 716.a.

pride joined to youth and folly, is inflamed in soul with insolence, dreaming that he has no need of ruler or guide, but rather is competent himself to guide others, such an one is abandoned and left behind by the God.”²⁹² Namely, in a relationship with god and god’s law, the proper attitude a human being should have is being lowly (ταπεινός) and it may secure one’s happiness.

The works ascribed to Demosthenes are known to be slightly later than the writings of Plato. Demosthenes uses ταπεινός and its cognates twenty-two times. Obviously, in many cases they mean political insignificance of the states and cities.²⁹³ One of the clear examples of this use is found in his vigorous speech on the Chersonese. “Philip is prosperous and powerful and formidable to Greeks and barbarians alike, while you are deserted (ἔρημοι) and humiliated (ταπεινοί).”²⁹⁴ In one place, ταπεινόν refers to an opposite of virtue. “You cannot, I suppose, have a proud and chivalrous spirit, if your conduct is mean and paltry, any more than your spirit can be mean (μικρόν) and humble (ταπεινόν).”²⁹⁵ In both cases, since the idea of humility/humble is paired with the negative words ἔρημοι and μικρόν, and contrasted with the positive ideas of “prosperous,” “powerful,” “formidable” “proud” and “chivalrous,” it is easy to conclude that words ταπεινοί or ταπεινόν are to mean something negative.

²⁹² Ibid., Book IV.716.a.

²⁹³ Demosthenes, *Olynthiaca*, 1.9.5.; *Philippica*, 1.23.5.; *De Chersoneso*, 67.3.; *Philippica*, 3.21.1., *Philippica*, 4.69.5.; *De Falsa Legatione*, 325.6.

²⁹⁴ Demosthenes, *De Chersoneso*, 67.3. Translation from Demosthenes, *Demosthenes with an English Translation*, vol. 1 trans. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 211. The wording of the passage in *De Chersoneso* in dealing with humility is exactly same with *Fourth Philippic* 10.69. The same use of ταπεινός is found in Aeschines, *De Falsa Legatione*, 119.2.

²⁹⁵ Demosthenes, *On Organization*, in *Demosthenes*, trans. J. H. Vince (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 25.

One of the indisputable insights Demosthenes provides in his political speeches is the political use of “humility/humble.” In his writing, it mainly refers to political weakness. In the third *Philippic*, he says, “Philip rose to greatness from small and humble (μικροῦ καὶ ταπεινοῦ) beginnings.”²⁹⁶ In the speech for the people of Megalopolis, he also states, “It is surely possible to make the Thebans humble (ταπεινούς) without making the Lacedaemonians strong (ισχυρούς).”²⁹⁷

In one place, Demosthenes draws a descriptive picture of the state of being humble. In his speech against Meidias, who is a bitter enemy of Demosthenes, he describes Meidias as a brutal person who would show pity to nobody. He treats others as if they were beggars, the scum of the earth.²⁹⁸ Therefore, when he is in trouble, he deserves the same kind of hatred and brutality that he shows to others. Probably, Meidias would cry with his children and make a long and humble (ταπεινούς) appeal. Here, Demosthenes’ imagination goes on to figure out what his enemy being humble would look like: Weeping and making himself as pitiable a figure as he can.²⁹⁹

Probably the most important insight one can get from Demosthenes in trying to understand the idea of humility/humble in the Greek culture is the economic aspect of it. In a speech against Eubulides, Demosthenes speaks of Cleinias, the son of Alcibiades who is a powerful and wealthy Athenian who could bring two hundred men and a ship of his own to the war.³⁰⁰ What makes Demosthenes uncomfortable is the fact that his

²⁹⁶ Demosthenes, *Philippic III*, 9.21.

²⁹⁷ Demosthenes, *Pro Megalopolitanis*, 24.2.

²⁹⁸ Demosthenes, *In Midiam*, 185.3-7.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.2.

³⁰⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 8.17.1.

mother once served as a nurse to Cleinias³⁰¹ because the society understands that a nurse is a humble thing.³⁰² However, this does not mean Demosthenes is embarrassed by his mother “for it is not our being poor (πένητες) that would mark us as wrong-doers.”³⁰³ “In fact, many free men are forced to do those servile (δουλικά) and humble (ταπεινά) works because of poverty (πενία).”³⁰⁴ Being humble is not necessarily shameful. The very thing that should be condemned is not being humble but not being citizens.

Aristotle uses the ταπεινός and its cognates thirty-nine times in his known works. In most cases, he follows the opinion of his predecessors who have used negatively the idea of humility/humble.³⁰⁵ One special contribution he makes to the study of the idea of humility/humble is that he sometimes uses the term as contrary to the idea of virtue, which might be surprising to modern Christians. For him ταπεινός is a quality that constitutes vices. For example, meanness (ἀνελευθεριότητι) is a vice that is represented by three types: love of base gain, parsimony, niggardliness. It is all about profit for self, thus disregarding the good acts that may profit others. This vice does not go alone. It is usually accompanied by pettiness, sulkiness, humility (ταπεινότης), lack of proportion, ignobleness, and misanthropy.”³⁰⁶ The other vice Aristotle discusses in relation to ταπεινός is small-mindedness (μικροψυχία). It is a vice that makes one unable to evaluate what one really deserves. The small-minded person can take neither honor nor dishonor. This person is unable to bear even the smallest dishonor and is

³⁰¹ Demosthenes, *Contra Eubulidem*, 44.

³⁰² Ibid., 45.1.

³⁰³ Ibid., 45.2.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 45.4-6.

³⁰⁵ Cf. *Ethica Eudemia*, III.vi.13.; *De Partibus Animalium*, 1.1.1.; *Politica*, III.viii.4.

³⁰⁶ Aristotle, *De virtutibus et vitiis*, VII.14.

distressed and annoyed at everything. Aristotle coldly diagnoses the symptom of small-mindedness: Small-mindedness is accompanied by pettiness, querulousness, pessimism, and humility (ταπεινότης).³⁰⁷

In *Eudemian Ethics* book III, Aristotle also discusses the virtues and some minor graces of character that are unavoidably attached with their corresponding pair of vices. In this discussion, the goal of Aristotle is to suggest the mean; neither excess nor defect in the characters. It is chapter 3 where Aristotle puts the virtue of gentleness (πρᾶος) in his discussion in conjunction with harshness (χαλεπός).³⁰⁸ Gentleness is a quality that is opposed to the passionate, irascible, and savage, which are the state of the slavish and the senseless.³⁰⁹ The gentle are the people who bear with pain that arises from anger. However, the problem of the gentle is that their passion is not aroused even when it ought to be: they undergo insulting treatment readily and meet slights with humility (ταπεινότης).³¹⁰ Having humility is an extreme case of gentleness and it is a quality that one should avoid.

For Aristotle, pride (great-mindedness, μεγαλόψυχος) is a virtue. It is a rightful self-esteem. The person who is worthy of little (μικρῶν) and thinks him-/herself worthy of little is temperate (σώφρων), but not proud (μεγαλόψυχος). Pride implies greatness, as beauty implies a good-sized body. The proud man must be good in the highest degree, and greatness in every virtue would seem to be characteristic of a proud man.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Ibid., VII.25.

³⁰⁸ J. Solomon translates it as “irascibility.” Aristotle, *Ethica Eudemia*, III.3. In Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle Translated Into English Under the Editorship of W. D. Ross, M.A.* (Oxford: Humphrey Milford, 1940).

³⁰⁹ Ibid., III.3.7-11.

³¹⁰ Ibid., III.3.4.

³¹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.3.

However, Aristotle contrasts the picture of the proud man against the people called “the humble.” The proud would not shrink themselves in the presence of the powerful but are careful with those of moderate station because it is vulgar to lord over “the humble (ταπεινοίς).”³¹² It is indisputable that Aristotle uses ταπεινοίς as a social group that has not much resource or power. Shortly after the passage, he quickly changes his tone of depicting “the humble.” The characteristic of the proud is that they are unable to live at the will of another, unless it is the will of a friend. Living so is slavish. Flatterers are always servile (θητικοί), and humble people (ταπεινοί) are flatterers (κόλακες).

However, in one place he uses the term ταπεινοῦ (humble/low) in a sense that nobody had ever tried before his time. In *Metaphysics*, as he tries to define numbers, he speaks of the relationship between substances and their principles. In the process, he makes a list of obviously opposite notions that one can draw imaginary lines between: “short and long (βραχέος καὶ μακροῦ),” “small and big (μικροῦ καὶ μεγάλου),” “wide and narrow (πλατέος καὶ στενοῦ).” However, the last pair of these contrary notions in the list happens to be “deep and humble/low (βαθέος καὶ ταπεινοῦ).”³¹³

Both Tredennick and Ross conveniently, but awkwardly, translate ταπεινοῦ “shallow” since it is supposed to be the opposite of “deep.”³¹⁴ However, whereas ταπεινός is etymologically derived from the notion of “lowness,” as seen in Pindar³¹⁵ and Empedocles,³¹⁶ it is quite troublesome to see ταπεινός as an opposite idea of

³¹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.3. Bekker page 1124b.22. Translation from Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, trans. H. Rackham, vol. 19 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

³¹³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.992a.

³¹⁴ Aristotle, et al., *The Metaphysics* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933). Aristotle, and W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912).

³¹⁵ Pindar, *Nemean Odes*, III, 80-84.

³¹⁶ Empedocles, *Testimonia*, Fragment 35.5; 58.2.

βαθέος. Since Aristotle juxtaposes these ideas contrary to each other in pairs already, there is no reason why the last pair also contains two words that seem to be not contrary to each other. At this point, one should pay attention to the other meaning of βαθέος, which is “profound.” It means “being wealthy of something.” On the other hand, ταπεινός is used often to mean “poor.” Thus, when those two words are used to depict the condition of a body, they might mean “profound and poor” or, even better put, “fat and skinny.”

FROM THE THIRD CENTURY BCE TO THE TIME OF JESUS

At the end of the fourth century BCE there was a rising culture that modern scholars have named “New Comedy.” As “Old Comedy” is represented by the eleven extant plays of Aristophanes that deal with political tensions and social issues, Menander’s comedies are more of personal and erotic stories.³¹⁷ In the center of this new cultural phenomenon, there is Menander whose comedies were performed in public many times; they are probably written in the language that the mass audience in the Greek festivals could understand.

In Menander’s *Samia*, Moschion is an adopted son of a wealthy Athenian, Demeas. However, he is accused of something he has not done. Fuming with anger, he talks to himself, “But all the same I must not altogether overlook the slight and take it with a coward’s humility (ταπεινῶς).”³¹⁸ In the fragments that are attributed to

³¹⁷ David Konstan, *Greek Comedy and Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-4. Shawn O’Byrhim, and George Fredric Franko, *Greek and Roman Comedy: Translations and Interpretations of Four Representative Plays*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 85-88.

³¹⁸ Menander, *Samia*, 632-633. Translation from M. G. Balme, *The Plays and Fragments* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 75.

Menander, *ταπεινός* and its cognates are often associated with negative words such as “taken nobody (οὐδὲν λαμβάνει),”³¹⁹ “laying nowhere (τιθῆς ἐν μηδενί),”³²⁰ or “badly (κακῶς).”³²¹

Polybius, who wrote an extensive history during the second century, uses *ταπεινός* and its cognates twenty-eight times in his known works. As expected, he uses the terms in politically negative senses since his history is mostly about wars. When one state loses a battle, the result of it is usually depicted by *ταπεινός* and its cognates.³²²

There is an unexpected use of *ταπεινόν* in book 8. He uses it to describe the attire of Achaeus, a general who ruled part of the Greek Seleucid kingdom. He was falsely accused of a revolt, at least in the eyes of the historian. One night, he had to be examined by an officer named Arianus. On this occasion, he appeared with four of his friends. He dressed them in fairly good clothes while he himself wore a plain and ordinary dress and made himself appear to be of mean (*ταπεινόν*) condition.³²³ Polybius does not see it as an effort of Achaeus to be shown as a coward. Instead, he depicts his appearance as a political gesture to create sympathy.

In book 27, Polybius provides another window on how the ancient Greeks would treat a humble person (*ταπεινός*) like Achaeus before Arianus. Perseus, the last leader of Macedonia, was courageous enough give some trouble to Rome, which was a super power of the time. This trouble ended up with the third Macedonian war. In this battle, Perseus could manage some success in the beginning. When this news spread to the

³¹⁹ Menander, *Fragmenta* (Austin), 740.12.

³²⁰ Menander, *Fragmenta* (Koch), 160.3.

³²¹ Ibid., 1093.2.

³²² Polybius, *Historiae*, 3.116.8; 4.80.3; 6.15.7; 9.33.10; 9.37.10; 18.14.6. etc.

³²³ Ibid., 8.19.9.

Greeks, people showed their excitement, which is strange in the eyes of Polybius. Upon this happening, Polybius tells a parable to explain the unexpected act of the Greeks, using the image of a humble (ταπεινός) boxer against a celebrated invincible one. First, the sympathy of the crowd is at once given to the inferior man. They cheer him on and back him up enthusiastically. If he manages to punch the superior's face, people celebrate it with great excitement. However, it is not their true attitude. It is only from a curious sort of sympathy and natural instinct to favor the weaker."³²⁴

Quite contrarily to the case of Achaeus with a humble look, or the humble boxer in the parable, Polybius introduces Chaeron of Sparta with a totally different nuance. Unlike Achaeus, Chaeron, in the eyes of the historian, obviously is guilty of misusing the public funds. Thus, Polybius seeks the origin of the crime from Chaeron's upbringing: "He was a sharp and able man, but he was young and of humble (ταπεινός) station, and had received a vulgar education."³²⁵ Here the historian looks down on Achaeus and expresses his disgust by using the word ταπεινός.

The Septuagint, as a whole, including the texts known to be the later work of the first century, includes ταπεινός and its cognates two hundred seventy two times. Even though the historical setting of the original production of what is known to be the Septuagint is still in debate,³²⁶ scholars basically agree that probably the first translation of the Hebrew Torah into Koine Greek happened in the third century BCE.³²⁷ Not

³²⁴ Ibid., 27.9.3.

³²⁵ Ibid., 24.7.1.

³²⁶ William W. Combs, "The Transmission-History of the Septuagint," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146, no. 583 (1989): 255-96.

³²⁷ Melvin Peters, "Septuagint," in *ABD* 5:1093. See also Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta; Id Est, Vetus Testamentum Graece Iuxta Lxx Interpretes* (Stuttgart: Privilegierte württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935).

surprisingly, considering the traditional understanding of the connotation ταπεινὸς and its cognates in Greek literature, the Septuagint Torah leaves no mark of any positive use of ταπεινὸς even considering it is a translation from the Hebrew Bible. As seen in the Greek literature, ταπεινὸς in the Greek Torah refers to “oppressed (Gen. 15:3; Ex 1:12; Deut. 26:6),” “affliction (Gen. 16:11; 29:31),” “ill-treatment (Gen. 31:50),” “rape (Gen 34:2; Deut. 22:24),” or “low (Lev. 13:3; 13:20; 14:37; etc.).”

It is the later texts of the Septuagint that provide the evidence of the rising of the theological use of ταπεινὸς and its cognates. In relationship with the LORD, it is better and safer to be humble than proud. Being humble, even though it might not be good in relationships among human beings, is a human disposition before God that might bring God’s grace or avoid divine punishment.

Three kings show good examples of this attitude of being humble and how it works in relation to the LORD. The first one is King Hezekiah. He was sick to death and prayed to the LORD; the LORD gave him a sign (σημεῖον). However, because he was proud in heart (ὕψωθη ἡ καρδία), he did not respond properly to the LORD. Thus, the LORD punished him, Judah, and Jerusalem. “And Hezekiah humbled (ἐταπεινώθη) himself after the exaltation of his heart (ὑψους τῆς καρδίας), he and the people in Jerusalem; and the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” (2Chr. 32:26).

Manasseh experiences the same. The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they did not listen to the LORD. Thus through the power of Assyria, the LORD lets Manasseh be taken away to Babylon as a captive. “And when he was afflicted, he sought

the face of the LORD his God, and was greatly humbled before the face of the God of his fathers.” (2Chr. 33:12) Because of this, the LORD brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom and Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.³²⁸

The third king is Josiah. Even though he began to reign at the age of eight, he did what was right in the sight of the LORD (2 Chr. 34:1-2). He sought the LORD of his father David (34:2). His religious reformation was quite remarkable: He destroyed all the altars dedicated to the idols around the Judean territory and repaired the house of the LORD. However, his reformation was not enough to stop the impending doom of the nation. The law of the LORD that Saphan read to him showed what would take place in the land of Israel and Judea. In response, he tore his garment in repentance. This was considered as an act of humility before the LORD: “Thus said the LORD God of Israel, as for the words which you have heard, forasmuch as your heart was ashamed, and you were humbled (ἐταπεινώθης) before me when you heard my words against this place, and against the inhabitants of it, and you were humbled before me, and tore your garments, and wept before me” (2 Chr. 34:27). The result of this act of humility is a promise of the LORD. “Behold, I will gather you to your ancestors and you shall be gathered to your grace in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place and its inhabitants” (2 Chr. 34:28).

³²⁸ His son Amon, however, did not learn a lesson from the story of his father. As a young ruler, he did evil things just like his father Manasseh: He sacrificed to to all the idols his father had made. But the most fatal mistake he made is that he was not humble (ἐταπεινώθη) before the LORD as his father Manasseh was (2 Chr. 33:23). The result was tragic. His servants conspired against him and slew him in his house.

It is undeniable that there is a special bond between the LORD and the people called “ταπεινός,” probably the low class of the society, even though being in the state of “ταπεινός” is not socially desirable. This kind of idea is well represented in the words of Judith: “For your strength does not depend on numbers, nor your might on the powerful. But you are the God of the lowly (ταπεινῶν), helper of the oppressed (ἐλαττόνων), upholder of the weak (ἀσθενούντων), protector of the forsaken (ἀπεγνωσμένων), savior of those without hope” (9:11, NRSV). In Proverbs, the Lord resists the proud; but he gives grace to the humble (3:34). 1 Maccabees 14:14 also supports the same theme: “He gave help to all the humble (ταπεινοῦς) among his people; he sought out the law, and did away with all the renegades and outlaws.”

Proverbs presents the idea of “ταπεινός” in the highly theological sense that it can be seen as a virtue. However, one should not conclude too quickly that its use of ταπεινός is similar to the use of it among the Christian writers, since it is mostly viewed as a virtue only when compared to the toxic state of human pride (ὑβρις). Examples abound.

“Whenever pride enters, there will be also disgrace; but the mouth of the humble (ταπεινῶν) studies wisdom ” (11:2).³²⁹

“Better is a gentle-spirited with humility (ταπεινώσεως) than one who divides spoils with the proud (ὑβριστῶν)” (16:19).

“Before ruin a man’s heart is exalted (ὑψοῦται), and before honor it is humble (ταπεινοῦται)” (18:12).

“Pride (ὑβρις) brings a man low (ταπεινοῖ), but the LORD upholds the humble in spirit (ταπεινόφρονας) with honor” (29:23).

³²⁹ In some sense, being humble might profit one since it may give one opportunity to learn the LORD’s statutes (Psa. 119:71).

Among the books in the Septuagint, the Wisdom of Ben-Sira, commonly known as Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, is the one that shows the most similar understanding of humble/humility to that of the early Christians. It is known to be the work of Ben Sira, who wrote in Jerusalem during the early second century BCE.³³⁰ However, it was originally composed in Hebrew and later translated into Greek, possibly by his grandson.³³¹

The Wisdom of Ben Sira uses ταπεινός and its cognates twenty-seven times, and in many cases the uses of them slightly differ from the traditional Greek use. Just as in Proverbs, Ben Sira recognizes that being humble is the proper attitude of a human being before the LORD. “Those who fear the Lord prepare their hearts, and humble themselves before him” (2:17). Apart from the theological and spiritual disposition of being humble before the LORD, being in a humble state is socially and politically undesirable in the eyes of Ben Sira. However, he finds an educational use of humiliation. “Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation” (2:4-5).

Probably one of the most unique understandings of ταπεινός among the ancient writers is found in the Wisdom of Ben Sira 3:17-21. It is the first and longest passage in Greek literature solely dedicated to the idea of humble/humility before the time of Christianity even though it is a translation from Hebrew.

³³⁰ Alexander A. Di Lella, “Wisdom of Ben Sira,” in *ABD* 6:931-945.

³³¹ Louis Francis Hartman, “Sirach in Hebrew and in Greek,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1961): 443-51. For more information about the historical setting of the book, see Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation With Notes*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 3-16.

- 3:17 My child, perform your tasks with humility (πραΰτητι);
then you will be loved by those whom God accepts.
- 3:18 The greater you are, the more you must humble (ταπεινούς)
yourself;
so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord.
- 3:19 (Many are in high place, and of renown:
but mysteries are revealed unto the meek.)³³²
- 3:20 For great is the might of the Lord;
but by the humble (ταπεινῶν) he is glorified.
- 3:21 Neither seek what is too difficult for you,
nor investigate what is beyond your power.³³³

There are a few insights one can gain to understand the idea of humble/humility in Ben Sira. First, in verse 17, the English translation “humility” is not from ταπεινός but from πραΰτητι. However, considering the following passages, which is an explanation of why one should “perform with humility,” it must be said that at least in Ben Sira, πραύς is a synonym of ταπεινός. Second, one can observe that being “great” and being “humble” can go together. Verse 18 says, “ὅσῳ μέγας εἶ, τοσούτῳ ταπεινὸν σεαυτόν, καὶ ἔναντι κυρίου εὐρήσεις χάριν.” There is no doubt that Ben Sira separates the religious-spiritual understanding of humility from the socio-political understanding of humility. They are two totally different ideas, but not necessarily incompatible with each other. People do not need to choose one or the other. They can have both qualities: the great can be humble at the same time. This is a huge jump from the general understanding of ταπεινός in the Greek world.

Verse 18 is followed by two immediate comments. First, verse 19 shows the reason why one should be humble: It is to the humble that God reveals his plan. Second,

³³² This verse is missing in the Greek Septuagint. The verse inserted here is from the King James Version of the Apocrypha.

³³³ Translation from NRSV

verse 20 states, “The LORD’s power is great but he is glorified by the humble (ταπεινῶν).” Since Ben Sira states in verse 18 that the great should be humble, it is not possible to apply the traditional Greek understanding of ταπεινός to understanding “the humble” in the passages. Thus, Sirach 3:21 comes as a key passage to understand the definition of “the humble” in Ben Sira’s theology. Ben Sira seems to suggest that “the humble” are the people who “Neither seek what is too difficult for you, nor investigate what is beyond your power.” Thus, Di Lella summarizes, “The humility Ben Sira urges in this poem is a combination of attitudes and virtues toward oneself and others, including an adequate self-image, patience, modesty, docility, meekness, awareness of one’s limitations, respect for others, and above all, total dependence on God.”³³⁴

Ben Sira offers some moral advice in concerning neighbors in chapter seven, verses sixteen and seventeen. Verse sixteen in Greek reads, “Do not enroll in the ranks of sinners; remember that retribution does not delay.”³³⁵ This reading matches well with the following verse: “ταπείνωσον σφόδρα τὴν ψυχὴν σου, ὅτι ἐκδίκησις ἀσεβοῦς πῦρ καὶ σκώληξ (Humble your soul greatly; vengeance of the ungodly is fire and worms).” Here Ben Sira identifies “sinners” (ἁμαρτωλῶν) in verse sixteen with “ungodly” (ἀσεβοῦς) in verse seventeen. He does not forget to mention how to avoid such ranks: You should humble your soul (yourself). This moral remedy is well echoed with verse fifteen that reads, “Do not hate hard labor or farm work, which was created by

³³⁴ Patrick W Skehan, and Alexander A. Lella Di, 160.

³³⁵ The Syriac version reads, “Do not esteem yourself better than your fellows; remember, his wrath will not delay.” Thus, Skehan and Di Lella prefer the Syriac reading because it makes better sense of verse seventeen. Ibid., 198. Translation from NRSV.

the Most High” since hard labor or farm work is a mark of the people called “ταπεινός” in the Greek world.

Ben Sira recognizes that there is a special relationship between God and the humble. He urges his readers not to let exploitation of the powerless happen, for the LORD is the God of justice (35:15).³³⁶ There he provides a long list of the socially oppressed people: the poor (πτωχοῦ), one who is wronged (ἡδίκημένου), orphan (ὀρφανοῦ), and widow (χήρας), which are represented with the word in verse 21, “the humble (ταπεινοῦ).” They might look powerless but they have power. “The prayer of the humble (ταπεινοῦ) pierces the clouds, and it will not rest until it reaches its goal; it will not desist until the Most High responds.”

Of course, the positive use of ταπεινός and its cognates found in various places in Ben Sira does not mean that he totally departs from the traditional Greek understanding of them or the semitic range the Hebrew word *anah* would cover. In Ben Sira, it is often a quality of life that one wants to avoid. In 13:8, he suggests, “Take care not to be led astray and humiliated when you are enjoying yourself (NRSV).” When one is humble in the economic sense, he/she will be forgotten by friends: “When the rich person totters, he is supported by friends, but when the humble falls, he is pushed away even by friends. If the rich person slips, many come to the rescue; he speaks unseemly words, but they justify him. If the humble person slips, they even criticize him; he talks sense, but is not given a hearing” (13:21-22, NRSV). Even being humble might be a sign of God’s curse: “Some he blessed and exalted, and some he made holy and brought near

³³⁶ The words are probably taken from Isaiah 30:18.

to himself; but some he cursed and brought low (ἐταπείνωσεν), and turned them out of their place” (33:12, NRSV).

The Book of Isaiah in the Septuagint shows a clear contrast to the Wisdom of Ben Sira in using the idea of humble/humility. Whereas the Wisdom of Ben Sira translated into Greek praises the idea of humble/humility, possibly as an already-recognized virtue among the Greek-speaking Jews, Isaiah uses the word mainly to depict the impending damnation.

- 2:11 The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low (ταπεινός),
and the pride of everyone shall be humbled (ταπεινωθήσεται);
and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.
- 2:17 The haughtiness of people shall be humbled (ταπεινωθήσεται),
and the pride of everyone shall be brought low;
and the LORD alone will be exalted on that day.
- 5:15 People are bowed down (ταπεινωθήσεται), everyone is brought low,
and the eyes of the haughty are humbled (ταπεινωθήσονται).
- 13:11 I will punish the world for its evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity;
I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant,
and lay low (ταπεινώσω) the insolence of tyrants. ³³⁷

Among the first century BCE writers, Diodorus Siculus uses the term one hundred sixteen times in his exhaustive work *Bibliotheca Historica* that consists of forty books. As a historian, he tries to deal with universal human and national affairs. His knowledge reaches to Ancient Egypt (Book 1), Mesopotamia, India, Scythia, and Arabis (Book 2). The stories are mixed with myths and actual happenings from the Trojan War to the death of Alexander the Great (Books 7-17). The last section concerns the events from the time

³³⁷ Translation from NRSV.

right after the death of Alexander the Great to the beginning of Julius Caesar's Gallic War (Books 17 to 40).

As seen in the case of Polybius the historian, Diodorus uses *ταπεινός* and its cognates to mean physical lowness in many cases (3.21.1.5; 3.22.4.2; 3.40.3.1; etc.). He also uses the term to refer to decreasing, reducing, or waning.³³⁸ However, the majority of the uses of this term refers to humiliation in a negative sense, socially or politically imposed upon a person, people, or nation. For example, in Book 2, Diodorus states, "Laws also were established by her (daughter of Ares) by virtue of which she led forth the women to the contests of war, but upon the men she fastened humiliation (*ταπεινῶσιν*) and slavery (2.45.2.9)."³³⁹ It might refer to an action of Fortune who changes one's fate: "The Lacedaemonians recovered their zeal; for if men have practiced many virtues and bravery from their youth, even though some turn of fortune has humbled (*ταπεινώσῃ*) them, yet a brief speech will recall them to their sense of duty (8.13.1.3)."

Diodorus' contemporary Dionysius Halicarnassensis uses *ταπεινός* and its cognates one hundred fourteen times in his known works. He fails, however, to show any difference in understanding and use of the humble/humility idea, either from his

³³⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 2.59.9.1. "The reeds, they say, from which the fruit for their nourishment is derived, being a span in thickness increase at the times of full-moon and again decrease proportionately as it wanes (*ταπεινοῦσθαι*)."

Translation from Charles Henry Oldfather, *Diodorus of Sicily* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1953), 81.

³³⁹ See *Ibid.*, 10.12.1. "To recount the lives of men of the past is a task which presents difficulties to writers and yet is of no little advantage to society as a whole. For such an account which clearly portrays in all frankness their evil as well as their noble deeds renders honor to the good and abases (*ταπεινοῖ*) the wicked by means of the censures as well as the praises which appropriately come to each group respectively. And the praise constitutes, one may say, a reward of virtue which entails no cost, and the censure is a punishment of depravity which entails no physical chastisement."

contemporaries or the previous Greek thinkers. For him, it refers either to powerlessness³⁴⁰ or cowardice.³⁴¹ However, he is very clear on one fact: ταπεινός is a social class and this “class” is what builds the state called Rome.

In book 2, he discusses the divisions of human society appointed by Romulus, the first king of Rome. Here the people called “*tapeinon*” are also called “*plebeians*” and they are called “common people.”

But there was another division again of the men only, which assigned kindly services and honors in accordance with merit, of which I am now going to give an account. He distinguished those who were eminent for their birth, approved for their virtue and wealthy for those times, provided they already had children, from the obscure, the lowly (ταπεινῶν) and the poor. Those of the lower rank he called “plebeians (πληβείους),” Greeks would call them common people (δημοτικούς), and those of the higher rank “fathers (πατέρας),” either because they had children or from their distinguished birth or for all these reasons.³⁴²

The ταπεινῶν might be the lower class people in Rome. However this does not mean they are despised, forgotten, and rejected. Rather, according to Dionysius, they are protected by the political system as citizens of Rome,³⁴³ which resembles the Jewish understanding of the special bond between God and the people called ‘*anah*. This system

³⁴⁰ “At any rate, though I might wish to change my spirit and make myself humble (ταπεινόν), in order that you might scent no danger from me, I could not do so; on the other hand, if I remain what Nature and my habits have made me, I shall appear offensive in your eyes and shall seem to be diverting control to my own hands.” Dionysius Halicarnassensis, *Antiquitates Romanae*, 19.18.7.1. Translation from Earnest Cary, *The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1937).

³⁴¹ *Antiquitates Romanae*, 12.13.4.5.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.8.1.1-9.

³⁴³ “But Romulus not only recommended the relationship by a handsome designation, calling this protection of the poor and lowly (ταπεινῶν) a “patronage,” but he also assigned friendly offices to both parties, thus making the connexion between them a bond of kindness befitting fellow citizens.” *Ibid.*, 2.9.3.1-5.

works so well that the *tapeinon* would eagerly want to be conservatives to keep the society as it is and that would benefit the high class people too.³⁴⁴

It would be interesting to see the idea of humble/humility understood by a person who was well educated in the Greek world. If that person is Jewish and a contemporary of Jesus and Paul, and has nothing to do with Christian theology, it would be more interesting for the study of the idea of humble/humility. Philo of Alexandria is such a person. In the known works of Philo, he uses the term *ταπεινός* and its cognates sixty-one times. Generally speaking, Philo is a Greek thinker even though he is a child of Jewish parents. Thus, his language and understanding of the idea of humble/humility is not so different from the Greek majority. In most cases, he uses the terms in negative senses. His *Allegorical Interpretation* P³⁴⁵ shows his understanding of humble/humility language most clearly.

For courage is the knowledge of what is to be withstood, and of what is not to be withstood, and of what is indifferent. And it encircles and surrounds Ethiopia, making demonstrations of war against it; and the name of Ethiopia, being interpreted, means humiliation (*ταπείνωσις*). And cowardice (*δειλία*) is a humiliating (*ταπεινόν*) thing; but courage is adverse to humiliation (*ταπεινώσει*) and to cowardice (*δειλία*).³⁴⁶

This kind of understanding leads him to a different thought process: Godly people would be strangers to the idea of humble/humility, which is vice. Thus, it is unthinkable that a perfect man like Moses, who was a chosen leader of God for the people of Israel,

³⁴⁴ "By this and not a few other measures of like nature they caused the plebeians and the lower class (*ταπεινόν*) to be eager for a continuance of the existing order." Ibid., 5.2.2.3.

³⁴⁵ All Philo's works mentioned here use the titles put by Charles D. Yonge, unless noted. See Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, New updated ed ed. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Pub, 1993).

³⁴⁶ Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*, 1:68.

can have any humble (ταπεινὸν) thought.³⁴⁷ Anyone who is guided by God's law will not be compelled to admit anything lowly (ταπεινὸν), anything unworthy, of their greatness.³⁴⁸ He even calls leprosy a "humble disease" because it is the mark of damnation and the most detestable sickness human beings can have.³⁴⁹

To Philo, a humble attitude is evil. In one place, Philo borrows the idea of the mean from Aristotle³⁵⁰ concerning the idea of humble/humility even though his is much different from Aristotle's. For him, one must position oneself between two extreme attitudes, which are evil. One extreme is excessive pride (ὑπέραυχον) which is to be full of much insolence. The other extreme is taking up with a humble (ταπεινοῦ) and self-abasing attitude.³⁵¹ Considering this, it is not surprising that in his treatise *On the Virtues*, neither does the word ταπεινός nor its cognates appear, even though he clarifies arrogance (τῦφος) as being a vice that leads one to destruction. For him, it is not humility that can be a virtue but the "lack of arrogance (ἄτυφίαν)."³⁵²

Acknowledging the Greek side of Philo does not mean he has nothing to do with the traditional Jewish understanding of the relationship between God and human beings that requires humility on the human side. His major subjects for his writings are the stories and characters of the Hebrew Bible after all. In a commentary on Genesis 15:2-18, titled *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things?* Philo speaks through the words of Abraham,

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 3:134. Cf. Numbers 12:3.

³⁴⁸ Philo, *That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*, 13.

³⁴⁹ Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*, 47.

³⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Ethica Eudemia*, III.3.7-11.

³⁵¹ Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham*, 147.

³⁵² Philo, *On the Virtues*, 16-17.

For I have learnt to appreciate my own nothingness, and to look up to the excessive and unapproachable height of thy munificence; and whenever I know that I am myself “but dust and ashes,” or even, what is still more worthless, if there is any such thing, then I feel confidence to approach thee, humbling myself (ταπεινός), and casting myself down to the ground, so completely changed as scarcely to seem to exist.³⁵³

Furthermore, he seems to understand the educational use of humility as in the case of Ben Sira 2:4-5. In *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*, which is a commentary of Genesis 16:1-6, Philo tries to defend the act of Sarah, personified wisdom, who afflicted Hagar, personified low knowledge. The Hebrew word *anah* is translated into Greek ἐκάκωσεν, which should always refer to admonishing or correcting (*Studies*, 151-157). This exegesis turns into a moral lesson for Philo: affliction regulated by law is beneficial. “Thus, therefore, there is a certain description of affliction which is profitable, so that its very most humiliating (ταπεινότατον) form, even slavery, is accounted a great good” (*Studies*, 175).

Like any other writers of the Hebrew Bible, he notices the special relationship between God and the humble, and thus warns the reader not to despise others:

For if the uncreated, and immortal, and everlasting God, who is in need of nothing and who is the maker of the universe, and the benefactor and King of kings, and God of gods, cannot endure to overlook even the meanest (ταπεινότατον) of human beings, but has thought even such worthy of being banqueted in sacred oracles and laws, as if he were about to give him a lovefeast... how can it be right for me, who am a mere mortal, to hold my head up high and to allow myself to be puffed up, behaving with insolence to my equals whose fortunes may, perhaps, not be equal to mine, but whose relationship to me is equal and complete, inasmuch as they are set down as the children of one mother, the common nature of all men? (*Decalogue*, 41).

³⁵³ Philo, *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things?*, 29.

This understanding is affirmed again in *The Special Laws*:

Yet vast as are his (God's) excellences and powers, He takes pity and compassion on those most helplessly in need, and does not disdain to give judgment to strangers or orphans or widows. He holds their low estate (ταπεινὸν) worthy of His providential care, while of kings and despots and great potentates He takes no account. (*Laws*, 1.308)³⁵⁴

For Philo, the social class called “the humble” consists of “the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (*Laws* 4:176).” They are protected by the supreme King and God did not exclude them from the provisions of His laws.

Finally, one should note that it is possible for the ancient people that their understanding of humble/humility was flexible enough to create such poetic expression as “beautiful humiliation (καλὴν ταπείνωσιν).”³⁵⁵ This expression is unique and found in *On Flight and Finding*, which is an exposition of Genesis 16:6-12 concerning the flight of Hagar away from Sarah.³⁵⁶ Here Philo praises the attitude of Hagar. Even though it was evident that she could accuse Sarah, she did not say anything, which symbolizes her “humility.” The angel was glad to see her humility and directed her to the right future. This is a moral lesson that can be applied to the relationship between a teacher and student. When a student is humble, it is much easier to correct imperfection. Thus, this attitude can be called “beautiful.”

³⁵⁴ Translation from F. H. Colson, *Philo*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950), 279.

³⁵⁵ Philo, *On Flight and Finding*, 207.

³⁵⁶ None used this phrase among the ancient Greek writers. The closest phrase one can find is from *Helenae encomium* of Isocrates of the fourth century. However, it is totally different from the phrase of Philo. The expression in Isocrates is κάλλος ταπεινός. Κάλλος is an object noun and ταπεινός is an adjective for the subject. This phrase is to depict what Zeus would do when he approaches the beautiful. He would take a form of the humble like a swan or human being.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to say that the general idea of *ταπεινός* and its cognates in the Greek language appears to be negative. In an economic sense, it is the people without any resource for survival as seen in Isocrates, Demosthenes, or Xenophon. In a political sense, it refers to losing battles as seen in the writings of many Greek historians. In a social sense, it is the lower class as seen in Polybius and others. In a moral sense, it is the attitude of the cowardly and mean as observed in the discussion of Aristotle and Philo. This kind of negative understanding of the idea of *ταπεινός* is not just for the educated people but for common Greeks, including slaves, as the language of the dramas of Euripides or Menander witness. In short, quite contrary to the Christian understanding, those terms mostly refer to either vice or negative human experiences.

It is hard to tell in what context the semantic range of the terms can contain positive meanings. One might say, but without overconfidence, that what turns the tone of the idea of humble/humility from vice to possibly virtue is not a moral/economic/social/ or political quality one might have, but the person one faces. It is said in many cases among the Greek writers, like Plato, that before gods, it would be a better idea to give up pride and take humility, regardless of one's status. Even heroes like Perseus and Hercules were recommended to be humble before Zeus even though they didn't like it. This idea is clearer in religious writings like the Septuagint and Philo. The reasons for this are very simple. First, gods are powerful and can easily change one's destiny, as Aesop says, even without any particular reason. One can try to take control of his/her own life, but in

reality the more powerful are always in control. Second, gods do not like people who boast. Xenophon and the Septuagint are clear about that.

What separates Jewish thinkers presented in the Prophets and Writings of the Hebrew Bible from the Greek thinkers is the understanding of the relationship between God and the people represented by the word ταπεινός. For the Jewish thinkers, there is a special bond between God and the “the humble.” God is the protector of them. In both the Septuagint and the writings of Philo, it is strongly attested that God is the God of the poor, orphan, strangers, and widows who are socially called “the humble.” This concept is very weak in the writings of the Greek thinkers or not as strong and clear as it is in the Hebrew Bible. At best, Dionysius of Halicarnassensis supports the idea that “the humble” should be protected politically by the state.

Chapter 5

HUMBLE/HUMILITY IN THE GOSPELS

The writings of the New Testament were born in the first century, when traditional Judaism was still trying to respond to Hellenistic culture mainly brought by the Roman conquest. Beginning with the conquests of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), Hellenism started to permeate almost every aspect of the Mediterranean world. Johnson states, “Although Hellenism was given a new frame by the Roman Empire, beginning with the accession of Augustus in 31 BCE, the influence of Hellenism continued strong throughout the days of the Roman Empire.”³⁵⁷ Hellenism was an intermingling cultural power that tried to unify all human beings under the “Greek way of life.”³⁵⁸ Under this kind of influence, it was not surprising to see people like Paul who was “a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee” (Phil. 3:5) and a “Roman citizen” (Acts 22:25-29).

The political landscape of the Mediterranean world was largely shaped by the fights among the successors of Alexander the Great for supremacy after his death. This was specifically true for the people in the land of Israel. Sandwiched between the Ptolemaic Empire centered in Egypt and the Seleucid Empire centered in Syria, Palestine became a victim of rivalry between the two superpowers. Both wanted to collect revenues from the inhabitants and they met often to fight in this land. Since their return from the Babylonian exile, the Jews could not do anything to decide their own political fate except helplessly watch their world being sapped by Greco-Roman influence.

³⁵⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 23.

³⁵⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students*, vol. 1 (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1975), 55.

Johnson rightly points out that the Greek language was “the most powerful tool of Hellenization, the dream of Alexander.”³⁵⁹ Greek culture spread through the medium of its language.³⁶⁰ *Koine* soon became the language of trade, administration, philosophy, and religion. For Hellenistic Jews, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, which is known as the Septuagint (LXX). It continued to be the Bible for many, including the first Christians. This use of one language, even though local languages such as Aramaic or Coptic continued to be used, enabled the people of the Mediterranean world under the power of Greco-Roman influence to diffuse new ideas and old.

Observing all these political and cultural turmoils since the time of Alexander the Great to the first century CE gives insight to the study of Christianity: “Christianity cannot in fact be derived from the Hebrew Bible or Jewish tradition alone,”³⁶¹ even though it started from a Jewish man in the land of Israel. This understanding implies that some of the most important concepts of Christian theology and ethics might come from cultures other than Jewish or a synthesis of both Judaism and the Greco-Roman culture. Surely, the idea of humble/humility cannot be considered a pure product of Christianity.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the language of humble/humility plays in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the third chapter, it was observed that the Hebrew Bible might be the inspiration for the idea of humility as a Christian virtue. There are many examples of humility as a virtue in the Prophets and Writings. However, one should notice that there is no uniformity of meaning in the Prophets and Writings. They use

³⁵⁹ Johnson, 25.

³⁶⁰ Martin, 55.

³⁶¹ Gregory J. Riley, *The River of God*, 15.

those terms ambiguously. Even though in many cases the word “humility” as an abstract noun is used to mean a form of a virtue as seen in Proverbs, for example, it can also mean a result of sin or a punishment brought by the higher power. It can be a description of the underprivileged. In addition, the Torah does not readily support the idea and the Hebrew words for humble/humility are used in the Torah negatively, usually referring to “affliction,” “poverty,” “suffering,” “humiliation,” or “subjugation.” One should not be too quick to judge that humility as a Christian virtue is simply a continuation or an imitation of a Jewish virtue.

The fourth chapter discusses the language of humble/humility in the Greek literature as not fitting to the Greek ideal. In the Greco-Roman world, ταπεινός is a life style and attitude of the lowly, abject, poor, cowardly, and underprivileged. In this culture, pride (great-mindedness, μεγαλόψυχος) is a virtue, which is a rightful self-esteem.³⁶² When this cultural understanding and use of ταπεινός met the theology and Jewish ideal in the minds of the Hellenistic Jewish, there was diffusion as well as confusion, as seen in the Septuagint and Philo. Sometimes the attitude of ταπεινός is praised as a virtue, specifically in the book of Ben Sira; other times it is condemned as a vice, as seen in the writing of Philo.

Then, how does the New Testament use the term “humble/humility?” In the NRSV, the word “humility” as a noun and its cognates such as “humble, humbled, humbling, humiliated, humiliating, humiliation, etc.” appear twenty eight times. The

³⁶² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.3.

Greek correspondences of these English terms are ταπεινός and its cognates (25 times),

πραῦς (1 time), and καταισχύνετε and its cognate (2 times).

In the New Testament, ταπεινός and its cognates exclusively dominate in the presentation of the idea of humble/humility, occurring thirty-four times in thirty verses.³⁶³

Matt. 11:29	ταπεινός
Matt. 18:4	ταπεινώσει
Matt. 23:12	ταπεινωθήσεται, ταπεινώσει
Luke 1:48	ταπείνωσιν
Luke 1:52	ταπεινούς
Luke 3:5	ταπεινωθήσεται
Luke 14:11	ταπεινωθήσεται, ταπεινῶν
Luke 18:14	ταπεινωθήσεται, ταπεινῶν
Acts 8:33	ταπεινώσει
Acts 20:19	ταπεινοφροσύνης
Rom. 12:16	ταπεινοῖς
2Cor. 7:6	ταπεινούς
2Cor. 10:1	ταπεινός
2Cor. 11:7	ταπεινῶν
2Cor. 12:21	ταπεινώση
Eph. 4:2	ταπεινοφροσύνης
Phil. 2:3	ταπεινοφροσύνη
Phil. 2:8	ἐταπείνωσεν
Phil. 3:21	ταπεινώσεως
Phil. 4:12	ταπεινούσθαι
Col. 2:18	ταπεινοφροσύνη
Col. 2:23	ταπεινοφροσύνη
Col. 3:12	ταπεινοφροσύνην
James 1:9	ταπεινός
James 1:10	ταπεινώσει
James 4:6	ταπεινοῖς
James 4:10	ταπεινώθητε
1Pet. 3:8	ταπεινόφρονες
1Pet. 5:5	ταπεινοφροσύνην, ταπεινοῖς
1Pet. 5:6	Ταπεινώθητε

³⁶³ Of course, the importance of this vocabulary pales when compared to the number of occurrences of ἀγαπάω (love, 143 times, nouns only) or πίστις (faith, 243 times, nouns only).

In seven cases, the root appears in passive forms (Matt. 23:12; Luke 3:5, 14:11, 18:14; Phil 4:12, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6). Except James 4:10 and 1 Peter 5:6, all the verbs in passive voice refer to a negative experience as a punishment brought by a third person, of which God may be an agency. The two instances in James 4:10 and 1 Peter 5:6 use the root in an aorist passive but imperative form. In these cases, God is not the one who imposes humility on the person. Rather, as an imperative, the verb asks the hearer (reader) to do the action of humbling to him-/herself, and this action is connected to a promise of vindication. Eleven times the root occurs as a noun (Luke 1:48; Acts 8:33; 20:19; Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3; 3:21; Col. 2:18; 2:23; 3:12; James 1:10; 1 Pet. 5:5). Among those, four occurrences appear to refer to humility as a virtue (Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 5:5). The root appears as an adjective ten times (Matt. 11:29; Luke 1:52; Romans 12:6; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:1; James 1:9; 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:8; 5:5; 5:6). Except 1 Peter 3:8, they seem to mean a kind of socio-economic powerlessness.

In the gospels, ταπεινός and its cognates occur eleven times in eight verses (Matt. 11:29; 18:4; 23:12; Luke 1:48; 52; 3:5; 14:11; 18:14). Except Luke 1:48, 52, which is a song of Mary, and 3:5, a quote from the book of Isaiah, those words are included in Jesus' teaching. One interesting aspect of the idea of humble/humility is that it never appears in the gospel of Mark and John. It seems that both Mark and John are not as much interested as Q is in using that idea to project the theology of Jesus and the Christian community, even though this may not necessarily lead one to conclude that Q is the source of the biblical theology of humility.

MATTHEW 11:25-29

25 ¶ At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;
 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.
 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
 28 ¶ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble (ταπεινός) in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (NRSV)

In the study of the idea of humility, Matthew 11:25-29 deserves special attention because not only does it raise a host of interesting issues but also provides the only passage among the gospels in which Jesus describes himself as a "humble." Verses 25 to 27 are Jesus' bold proclamation of his close relationship with the Father (God). This passage describes a face-to-face relationship and reciprocal knowledge between Jesus and the Father. Jesus' special authority and status in relationship with the Father lets Jesus know the apocalyptic secrets of salvation and Jesus is thankful for the will of God for him to share the secrets with his disciples. Through this passage, Matthew obviously elevates Jesus to the level of equality with the Father. In this, many scholars readily filter out the sapiential (*Sophia*) tradition of Judaism: the Son is a personified Wisdom of the Hebrew tradition and he now invites his disciples to know the apocalyptic mystery he brings.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel*, Theological Inquiries (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 79; Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, 1st U.S. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 265-268; Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1982), 218-220;

Although verses 25-27 find their parallels in Luke 10:21-22, verses 28-29 have no parallels in the gospels. This of course leads many scholars to search for extra-biblical sources for the verses using “come to me,” “yoke,” and “rest” as the key words and they find several parallels from the extra-biblical sources.³⁶⁵ However, those scholars do not try to find any extra-biblical sources for the expression of “(I am) humble in spirit” because they assume that it might be from Matthew’s own theological tendency: He likes the phrase of “blessed are the poor (Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοί,)” in Luke 6:20 changed into the phrase “blessed are the poor in spirit (Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι).”

What does “humble in spirit” mean? There are various scholarly opinions on this self description of Jesus. For Gundry, the “yoke” is easy and light because a person “humble in heart” would not make the “yoke” heavy and demanding like the scribes and Pharisees do.³⁶⁶ Davies and Allison offer a totally different interpretation of Matthew 11:25-29. For them, the idea of the closeness of Jesus to the Father is not from the Wisdom tradition but from Matthew’s effort to picture Jesus as a successor of Moses.³⁶⁷ In Exodus 33, God “knows” Moses by name, and Moses in turn prays that he may “know” God. The mutual knowledge between God and Moses is strongly supported by Deuteronomy 34:10. “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face (NRSV).” Then, the saying of Jesus, “I am gentle” echoes

³⁶⁵ Sirach 51:23-27; Gospel of Thomas 90; Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654 1; Dialogue of the Savior 141:3-11; Gospel of the Hebrews 4. See Robert Walter Funk, *New Gospel Parallels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 66. Albright and Mann suggest that these key words are originated from Gnosticism to pagan Hellenistic mythology. See William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, 1st ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 147.

³⁶⁶ Gundry, 218-220.

³⁶⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 271-293.

Numbers 12:3 because Moses is known to be a very humble (πραῦς) person according to LXX.

Identifying Jesus as personified Wisdom in the Hebrew tradition and Moses pictured in LXX certainly has its own advantage to smooth out the flow between 25-27 and 28-29. However, in doing so, scholars pay too much attention to the personality side of Jesus³⁶⁸ while overlooking the socio-economic side of him. But when one understands the traditional Greek use of ταπεινός as an adjective, one will know that it is not easy to treat ταπεινός as a synonym of πραῦς.

The closest parallel to “ταπεινός τῇ καρδίᾳ” in Matthew 11:29 in secular Greek literature is found in *Evagoras* of Isocrates:

But Evagoras escaped this peril, and having saved himself by fleeing to Soli in Cilicia did not show the same spirit as those who are the victims of like misfortune. For other exiles from royal power are *humbled in spirit* (ταπεινοτέρως τὰς ψυχὰς) because of their misfortunes, whereas Evagoras attained to such greatness of soul that, although until that time he had lived as a private citizen, when he was driven into exile he determined to gain the throne. (Isocrates, *Evagoras*, 27.5.)

In Isocrates' story, “humble in spirit (ταπεινοτέρως τὰς ψυχὰς)” is a result of misfortune and is the opposite of greatness (μεγαλοφροσύνης) which is an ideal for the Greeks. Simply saying, if Jesus is understood as personified Wisdom or identified with Moses, “humble in heart” is not the right description for the Greek-speaking people.

Psalms 33:19 in LXX provides a close parallel to the expression of “humble in heart”: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted (συντετριμμένοις τὴν καρδίαν), and

³⁶⁸ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 173-174. Luz corrects himself on this comment in the same book, page 429, and understands *tapeinos* as referring to the socially underprivileged.

saves the crushed in spirit (ταπεινὸς τῷ πνεύματι).” In this verse, heart and spirit are used to mean the same, and neither the verb συντετριμμένοις nor the adjective ταπεινὸς are to mean “gentle.” Rather, they refer to a miserable human condition that calls for God’s intervenient action. Psalm 37:9 in LXX also sheds light on a correct reading of ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ. In this verse, David complains, “I am utterly spent and crushed (στεναγμοῦ τῆς ἐταπεινώθη); I groan because of the tumult of my heart (καρδίας).” Again these expressions are far from meaning “gentleness.”

On the use of πραῦς and ταπεινὸς in the same verse, Proverbs 16:9 in LXX gives an example: “It is better to be of a lowly (πραῦς) spirit among the poor

(ταπεινὸς).” The KJV reads it “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly.” The corresponding Hebrew words are שָׁפֵל-רוּחַ and אֶחָד-עָנִיִּים. As chapter three of this study points out, עָנִיִּים is not an ethical or moral term, but usually refers to the suffering, underprivileged, and poor. שָׁפֵל in the Hebrew Bible often is used negatively. The basic meaning of this word always stays in the idea of lowness whether it is a state of the physical or the spiritual-psychological realm. In any case, ταπεινὸς does not seem to refer to “gentleness” in a modern sense.

Considering these biblical and extra-biblical parallels, Jesus’ expression “humble in heart” does not seem to be a synonym for “gentle.” Rather, it is an expression of his sympathy with his followers. With this phrase, Jesus puts himself at the level of his audience even though he just now has identified himself with the Father. He knows God and God knows him, but Jesus knows suffering as much as his disciples do. “I am

humble in heart” means, “I know suffering deeply in my heart.”³⁶⁹ He has been crushed in heart just like any others who suffer. He is as poor as the disciples. His social position is as low as his followers. He is as lowly as the members of the Matthean church. It might be shocking to his hearers but also effective to deliver his intention in terms of rhetoric. The radical contrast between the two states of his identity by an infinite margin, divine but humble has a radical message for the Matthean community. Jesus must have all the authority but he identifies with the ordinary members of the Matthean congregation who are socio-economically humble.

Reading “humble in heart” as Jesus’ cordial sympathy with his followers, thus the congregation of Matthew’s church, helps one understand the saying of Jesus about the yoke and resting more easily. Jesus invites those who toil and bear burdens to take Jesus’ yoke and learn from him. Matthew considers his invitation attractive because it is not as hard as the yoke of the religious leaders of his time. Jesus’ yoke is not hard to bear because the one who puts the yoke to the followers is gentle and knows how difficult it is to take the yoke. This is a verbal attack against the scribes and Pharisees who “tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them” (Matt. 23:4). As one who knows suffering and knows how hard it is for the poor, lowly, and afflicted (who are called “the humble” in the Greco-Roman world) to take the yoke of religious duties, Jesus would not make his yoke heavy; therefore, his yoke would be considered as rest compared to the yoke of the religious leaders. However, this does not mean his yoke is not as effective as that of the

³⁶⁹ See Ragnar Leivestad, “Tapeinos-Tapeinophron,” *Novum Testamentum* 8, no. 1 (1966): 36-47.

religious leaders. Rather, his yoke is much better because God and Jesus know each other intimately.

MATTHEW 18:4

4 Whoever becomes humble (ταπεινώσει) like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (NRSV)

Chapter 18 constitutes the fourth of Matthew's five discourses marked by the concluding formula, "When Jesus had finished these sayings." The question that the disciples bring to Jesus is, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" The Markan version of the question is introduced as a result of a dispute among the disciples (Mark 9:33-37). Luke's presentation is not far from that of Mark. In Luke 9:46, the question is, "Who is the greatest among the disciples?"

Matthew does not put the disciples in an embarrassing situation, as do Mark and Luke. Rather, their question seems to arise simply out of curiosity. Jesus answers the question of the disciples with a visual illustration. He has a child (παιδίον) stand before them and says, "Whoever humbles (ταπεινώσει) himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

There are two major opinions on interpreting ταπεινώσει. The first is to adapt the traditional Christian understanding of humility as a spiritual and moral virtue. Gardner says that becoming like children is equated with self-humbling. Although he does not further explain what he means by "self-humbling," he assumes that it is an attitude of "perceiving ourselves afresh from the dependent vantage point of a child, with

no illusions of self-grandeur or self-sufficiency.”³⁷⁰ Schweizer connects ταπεινώσει with the concept of repentance while holding basically the same position as Gardner in interpreting the verse. According to him, to become a child is to take humility and turn from the thought, will, action, and self-concern of the adults in the world.³⁷¹ Nolland sees an allusion to Matthew 23:11 in 18:4, thus equating the “humble” with a spiritual attitude. For him, to be humble like a child is closely connected with the idea of self-denial that may lead one to submission to God and to one another.³⁷² Smith understands the concept of “humble like a child” in verse 4 as an antithesis to independence, confidence, and control over one’s life. According to him, “humble like a child” means dependance entirely on the gifts and power of another (God).³⁷³ For Filson, taking a child as an object is a lesson of trustful humility. This trustful humility is not only a precondition for entering the kingdom of God but also the measure of greatness there.³⁷⁴ Carson states, “The child is held up as an ideal, not of innocence, purity, or faith, but of humility and unconcern for social status.”³⁷⁵ This humility is an attitude of mind that ensures trust in the older guardian.

³⁷⁰ Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew*, vol. 10, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 275.

³⁷¹ Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 362.

³⁷² John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. Paternoster Press, 2005), 732.

³⁷³ Robert H. Smith, *Matthew*, vol. 1 of *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Pub. House, 1989), 216-217.

³⁷⁴ Floyd Vivian Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, vol. 1, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A. and C. Black, 1960), 199.

³⁷⁵ D. A. Carson, et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version*, vol. 8, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

The other opinion, which is more likely to be the true intention of Matthew, is to understand “humble like a child” as Jesus’ affirmation of low social position. Hare provides a suggestion that “the followers of Jesus must assume the status of a child, that is, they must join the lowest rank of a stratified society.”³⁷⁶ Humility was not a virtue but a vice for the Greco-Roman world. It was a servile attitude appropriate to slaves, women, and children. Through the words of Jesus, “Matthew turned this view on its head” by embracing the “humble” in society and inviting them into the Christian community.³⁷⁷ Gundry supports the idea that the definition of humility in 18:4 does not imply that children humble themselves, but that “their small stature symbolizes humility.”³⁷⁸ He draws this conclusion from his understanding of children in the ancient world where children occupied a low position in society.

It seems that the motivation behind the words of Jesus concerning “humble like a child” written by Matthew lies in his ecclesiastical concern. Namely, the Matthean community consisted of many undistinguished members whose social status was low and insignificant.³⁷⁹ It is probable that some Christians in his community tried to belittle those insignificant members. As to their thoughts, Matthew warns: The humble (socially) have the right to enter the kingdom of God and will be called “great.” This understanding is well supported by the following verses where Jesus says, “Whoever receives one such

³⁷⁶ Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew, of Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 208-211.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁷⁸ Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 360. Senior rightly points out that in traditional Mediterranean culture, the child was someone without status or power. See Donald Senior, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 206-207.

³⁷⁹ Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981), 374-376.

little child in my name receives me. But anyone who causes one of these little ones who believe in me to get into trouble would be better off if a huge millstone were hung about his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.” This view is well supported by Luz who understands that this whole pericope is a sermon to the Matthean church.³⁸⁰

In the greater Greco-Roman world, seldom does ταπεινός appear to refer to a virtue but more as a vice that might be translated as lowly, cowardly, little, poor, or servile. The same is true with Matthew. Even though the root ταπεινός is usually translated with the sense of humility or modesty as a virtue, it is hardly the case for Matthew. The image of a child in the ancient world did not signify humility but unimportance and ignorance.³⁸¹ Thus, it is safe to say that 18:4 is Matthew’s effort to encourage his congregation to take action in reversing their previous standards of thought so that they can take part in building a new community that is run by a different order and according to new standards. Hagner and France are strong advocates for this understanding of humility not as a spiritual virtue but as a social position. Hagner states, “The Child’s humility is its lack of status, not its actions or feelings of humbleness.”³⁸² France affirms his position by saying that “humble like this child” does not mean the mental virtue of humility but rather to accept the low social status which is symbolized by the child.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, 428-429.

³⁸¹ Peter Müller, *In Der Mitte Der Gemeinde: Kinder Im Neuen Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1992), 162.

³⁸² Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew*, vol. 33, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 518.

³⁸³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007), 678-679.

Matthew 23:11-12

11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled (ταπεινωθήσεται), and all who humble (ταπεινώσει) themselves will be exalted. (NRSV)

In the previous chapter, Jesus is involved in a couple of unpleasant debates with Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees have brought a question to Jesus, and Matthew reports that the intention behind the question is malicious (22:15). However, Jesus sharply rebuffs them with words of wisdom in public so that the Pharisees have to go away marveling (22:22). This does not, however, put the challenges from the religious groups to an end. The next question comes from the Sadducees concerning resurrection (22:23-33). Jesus defeats their theological challenge just as he did with the Pharisees and successfully defends his theological integrity before the audience (22:33). In verse 34, this action of Jesus is reported to the Pharisees as Jesus silencing the Sadducees.

In the next episode, Matthew brings the Pharisees back to the scene and has one of the Pharisees take the role of the questioner, unlike Mark who puts “one of the scribes” on the spot, and Luke who employs a lawyer. This change is of course redactional³⁸⁴ to serve Matthew’s specific purpose in the next two episodes: attacking the bureaucracy of the hypocritical Pharisees as religious leaders. After answering the question of one of the Pharisees, it is Jesus’ turn to ask a question: “What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he” (22:42)? The Pharisees, who are supposed to be specialists in the Hebrew Bible, fail to answer Jesus’ question.

³⁸⁴ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 76.

Chapter 22 builds up enough reasons for Jesus to unleash his harsh criticisms on the practices of the “scribes and the Pharisees” in chapter 23.³⁸⁵ One of the criticisms is that the religious sit on the “Seat of Moses, which is unknown to both Mark and Luke. Whether the “Seat of Moses” is a pure metaphor or a metaphor based on a reality in the synagogue architecture,³⁸⁶ it is clear that Matthew’s Jesus is unhappy with the religious hierarchy. Thus, Jesus tries to separate the practices of his followers from the practices of the Pharisees. The Pharisees are “they” and Jesus’ followers are “you.” “You” may need to do what “they” teach, but “you” should not practice what “they” do. “They” reside in the hierarchy among people but “you” have only one teacher and you are all brothers and sisters (v. 8). The culmination of this separation is summarized in verse 12: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled (ταπεινωθήσεται), and whoever humbles (ταπεινώσει) himself will be exalted.”

Jesus’ use of humble/humility words in verse 12 might initially remind the reader of Proverbs 29:23 or Job 22:29 that present the idea of the swapping of fate between the haughty and humble. However, if one reads verse 12 as a conclusion of the series of previous episodes of how Jesus treated the religious leaders, one may find a connection between what Jesus did to the Pharisees and Sadducees and what Jesus claims in verse 12, at least the first part of it. When the Pharisees tried to entangle Jesus in his talk, they had to go away amazed (22:22). When the Sadducees tried to humble Jesus, he declared

³⁸⁵ Benedict T. Viviano, “Social World and Community Leadership: The Case of Matthew 23:1-12, 34,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 39 (1990): 3.

³⁸⁶ See Israel Renov, “The Seat of Moses” in Joseph Gutmann, *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology, and Architecture* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1975), 233-238; Lee Levine, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 5, 135, and 166.

that they were ignorant of the Scripture (22:29) and thus they were silenced (22:34).

When the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus humiliated them by a question they could not answer (22:46). In short, they approached Jesus with pride but Jesus humbled them. Thus, it seems that 23:12 resembles more Psalm 18:27 that puts God in the position of the one who changes fate: “You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.”

The idea of a divine being as an agent of changing the fate of the proud and humble is not limited to the Hebrew Bible. As noted in chapter four, Aesop said, “He (Zeus) is humbling the proud and exalting the humble.”³⁸⁷ In Matthew’s presentation, Jesus becomes the one who can humble those who exalt themselves. This idea is revisited in chapter 25 where the eschatological Son of Man plays the role of the Judge.

There are a number of scholars who believe that Matthew writes chapter 23 to teach his congregation a new order that is different from the conventional social system.³⁸⁸ The ideal church in Matthew’s mind is a church without higher or lower members, a church of serving, a church of equals, of sisters and brothers in solidarity.³⁸⁹ In this church, the humble, in a socio-economic sense, are protected by Jesus’ proclamation. Does the phrase “humbling oneself” in verse 12 mean humility as a virtue? It seems that there is no particular reason to negate such an idea. However, considering the two previous instances of *tapeinos* (11:29 and 18:4) and Matthew’s concern for his

³⁸⁷ Hermann Diels, and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker, Griechisch Und Deutsch*, 6. verb. Aufl ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951), 63-66.

³⁸⁸ Senior, 259; Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, 110; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 864; etc.

³⁸⁹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, 110-111.

community, one may need to broaden the meaning of the phrase to include the socio-economic aspects of the Matthean community,

LUKE 1:48 AND 52

48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness (ταπείνωσιν) of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly (ταπεινούς). (NRSV)

It is well known that the Gospel of Luke tries to promote inclusiveness in the Church. He has no problem with seeing both Jews and Gentiles in the church. In his presentation of Jesus' ministry, Jesus' relationship with the gentiles is friendly while his relationship with Jews is often hostile. Lukan inclusiveness does not apply to ethnicity only. He extends his inclusiveness to the socio-economic realms, in that he speaks often on behalf of the poor and makes sure that the gospel is for them (Luke 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 18:22; 19:18; 21:2-3). He also is an advocate of giving alms and taking care of the poor as a Christian responsibility (11:14; 12:33; 19:1-10). Furthermore, it has been noted that Luke's Gospel contains more stories of women who play important roles than other Gospels (1; 2; 7:36-50; 10:38-42; 13:21; 15:8-10).³⁹⁰ Women in the ancient world were largely marginalized and underprivileged, which the word *tapeinos* can easily describe. Of course, this does not mean that all women were living the same kind of humble

³⁹⁰ There are scholars who say that Luke fails to let women escape their traditional roles. Typically, they serve at table, keep house, and bear children. Even Mary appears only when she has given birth to Jesus. See Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, 1st ed., Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 11.

lives.³⁹¹ In general, Luke seems to use *tapeinos* in the Greco-Roman sense that is closely related to the low social classes.

It is apparent that Luke begins his story with “a striking contrast between a priest named Zechariah and a peasant girl named Mary.”³⁹² The ways he unfolds both stories are similar to each other. To both Zechariah and Mary the angel of the Lord appears and delivers a message of supernatural birth: one from a barren woman and one from an unmarried girl. Both Zechariah and Mary respond with questions. Zechariah questions the validity of the angel’s announcement because he knows that he and his wife are beyond the age of conceiving. Mary’s question seems not so different from that of Zechariah: “How can this be because I do not know a man” (1:34)? Then each question ends up with totally different results. Zechariah’s question is considered doubt, so he is punished, while Mary’s question does not draw any negative response from the angel.

The contrast between Zechariah and Mary gives one insight to understand the humble/humility language in 1:48 and 52. Zechariah is very much respected in Luke’s introduction. He is righteous before God and living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord (1:6). Mary, on the other hand, has nothing special other than that she is a Nazarene girl engaged to a man. The only hint of Mary’s social status that the reader can glean is from Mary’s song: “He (the LORD) has looked

³⁹¹ James Malcolm Arlandson, *Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity: Models From Luke-Acts* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 120-150.

³⁹² Paul Borgman, *The Way According to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W. B. Eerdmans Pub, 2006), 19.

with favor on the lowliness (ταπεινῶσιν) of his servant” (1:48, NRSV).³⁹³ When this personal reference is contrasted with Zechariah’s social status, it is obvious that Mary’s “lowliness” is not an expression of spiritual attitude but a description of her social status. Mary occupied a position of poverty, powerlessness, and lowness in her society.³⁹⁴ This understanding is convincing when one considers other antithetical concepts of the “lowliness” within the story. Her “lowliness” is sharply contrasted with the concept of “the blessed” (μακαριοῦσιν), “the Mighty One” (ὁ δυνάτοζ), and “the powerful” (δυνάστας). Furthermore, “the lowly” (ταπεινούς) in verse 52 is also contrasted with the idea of “the rich” (πλουτοῦντας) and paralleled with “the hungry” (πεινῶντας), which support the reading of “the lowly” in a socio-economic sense.

Tannehill points out that the statement of God’s actions is in the past tense in Mary’s song. This is striking because “the power structures of society have not been disturbed so far.”³⁹⁵ Therefore, since the reference to God’s powerful “arm” in verse 51 reminds the reader of the phrase that is used in the Exodus (6:1, 6; 15:16; Deut 3:24), he concludes that the contrasts between “the powerful” and “the lowly,” or “the hungry” and “the rich” is the contrast between Egypt and Israel. In this context, Mary’s song invites the reader to remember how God helped Israel while punishing Egypt.

³⁹³ This verse has a parallel in 1Sam. 1:11. She (Hannah) made this vow: “O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.”

³⁹⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991), 42.

³⁹⁵ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 55-56.

Whether Mary's song is inspired by the Exodus story or not, it is highly visible in his Gospel that Luke does not deny that there are different social classes. He believes that the Christian community should not support that classism. Through Jesus, God will turn the power system upside down and Christians will be the agents to deliver the message of freedom and equality. God has done it before, as Mary testifies, and will do it again. This exchange of fate is familiar theme in Greek literature, where gods are responsible for reversing the fortunes of the proud.³⁹⁶

LUKE 14:11

14:11 For all who exalt themselves will be humbled (ταπεινωθήσεται), and those who humble (ταπεινών) themselves will be exalted. (NRSV)

The theme of eschatological reversal of fate in Matthew 23:12, which is found in many other places in the Bible³⁹⁷ and secular Greek literature,³⁹⁸ finds a new context in Luke's gospel. There are some similarities that one can easily observe between Matthew 23 and Luke 14. In Matthew's gospel, the context is that the Pharisees are gathered together and Jesus asks them a challenging and ridiculing question about the relationship between David and the Messiah. The physical and metaphorical object that makes Jesus uncomfortable thus saying that the theme of eschatological reversal of fate in 23:12 is the seat: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat (23:2, NRSV)... They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues" (23:6, NRSV). In

³⁹⁶ François Bovon, and Helmut Koester, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 61.

³⁹⁷ Proverbs 29:23 or Job 22:29, etc.

³⁹⁸ *Apophthegmata*, Division 3 Apophthegm 11 Line 3.

Luke's gospel, it happens that Jesus goes to the house of a leader of the Pharisees where the Pharisees might be gathered together (14:1). Jesus challenges the Pharisees with a question about whether it is right to cure people on the sabbath (14:3). Finally, the physical and metaphorical object that directly causes Jesus to say the words in verse 11 is the "seat."

The most striking difference between Matthew 23 and Luke 14 in terms of presenting the theme of eschatological reversal of fate in using the language of humble/humility is that it is offered as a parable in Luke's gospel, as many commentators notice,³⁹⁹ while Matthew presents it as a plain discourse. Does this mean that Luke's version has a second level of meaning? Tannehill's answer is yes. In human affairs, it may not be true, but in God's world this is how things work as verse 11 indicates.⁴⁰⁰

Verse 11 is a famous Greek phrase that is used in the Bible so many times as indicated earlier. It is obvious that "be humbled" (ταπεινωθήσεται) does not mean that those who exalt themselves will be virtuous by having humility. "Being humbled" is a punishment. It means "being disgraced" and "humiliated." In Jesus' parable, it is described by being forced to move down to "the lowest place" (14:9). On the other hand, there is a reward one can expect when one humbles (ταπεινῶν) him/herself. The host will honor the one who humbles (ταπεινῶν) him/herself by inviting that person to the higher place. In both cases, it seems to be practiced among human relationships.

³⁹⁹ Christopher Francis Evans, *Saint Luke*, vol. 3 of *TPI New Testament Commentaries* (Philadelphia: SCM Press Trinity Press International, 1990), 570; Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, vol. 3 in *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 229; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, vol. 3, *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991), 224.

⁴⁰⁰ Tannehill, 229.

For invited guests, taking the lower seat is a way of being humble. They will be exalted by the host. Then, how about the host? How can he or she be humble (ταπεινῶν)? The following passage in verse 12-14, which is peculiar to Luke, provides an answer. For Luke, the way for the host to humble himself/herself is to be with the socially outcast.

In this passage, Jesus gives an instruction on whom one should invite to dinner: “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” (14:13). As noted in chapter three and four, these are the typical examples of the lowly (ταπεινός) people of both Hebrew and Greco-Roman society. For the host, the chief Pharisee, inviting the lowly people to his table is next to absurd. Johnson rightly states, that the people on Jesus’ invitation list are socially and religiously outcast as Luke 7:22 indicates.⁴⁰¹ They are excluded from being chosen for the work of the priesthood (Lev. 21:17-21). The Qumran community considered them (except the poor) disqualified for any battle (1 QM 7:4-5):

7:4 No one crippled, blind or lame, nor a man who has a permanent blemish on his skin, or a man affected with ritual uncleanness of
7:5 his flesh; none of these shall go with them to battle. All of them shall be volunteers for battle, pure of spirit and flesh, and prepared for the day of vengeance.

All these indicate that the Pharisees, as deeply religious people, would not want to associate with them. On top of that, it is easily imaginable what kind of work and service would be involved in having them at the table. If they are the crippled, the lame, and the

⁴⁰¹ Johnson, 225.

blind, somebody would have to help them eat and clean up after themselves. The arrangement of this service would be the responsibility of the host.

Tannehill also points out that having the “lowly people” at the table would incur damages to one’s reputation as those whom one dines with has cultural implications. If the host is to invite the socially outcast, “in the eyes of the elite, the host is dishonoring himself by identifying with the poor. Therefore, verse 11 may apply to what follows as well as to what precedes. Those who invite family and people of status are exalting themselves by proclaiming their place in this group. Those who invited the poor and crippled are humbling themselves.”⁴⁰² However, there is a promise of Jesus attached to this humbling action of the host: “You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (14:14). This is what is meant by the age-old idea of the reversal of fate.

⁴⁰² Tannehill, 230.

HUMBLE/HUMILITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

In chapter four, it is observed that the Greek word *tapeinos* and its cognates are used negatively in most cases in the known Greek literature. They mostly refer to “low,” “poor,” “cowardice,” or “abject.” They are the opposite of the Greek ideal. In some cases, however, it is observed that those words can give nuances of “humble/humility” as the modern English might mean. Specifically, facing the super power of Zeus, powerful gods, or higher authority, sometimes people, heroes, or weaker gods are asked to be humble even though it is not always the case.

Within the Greek understanding of the concept of “humble/humility,” Xenophon’s story about the life of the Spartans is a unique exception. According to him, “humble/humility” can be a virtue in the Spartan culture. Their king Agesilaus is “never arrogant but humbler than the average man.”⁴⁰³ The Spartans “pride themselves on their humility”⁴⁰⁴ so that this attitude can lead the rest to the path of eager obedience. Even though the Spartan king’s humility was motivated by political propaganda, this shows that even among the Greek thinkers there was linguistic room for thinking of “humble/humility” as a virtue.

⁴⁰³ Xenophon, *Agesilaus*, 11.11.4

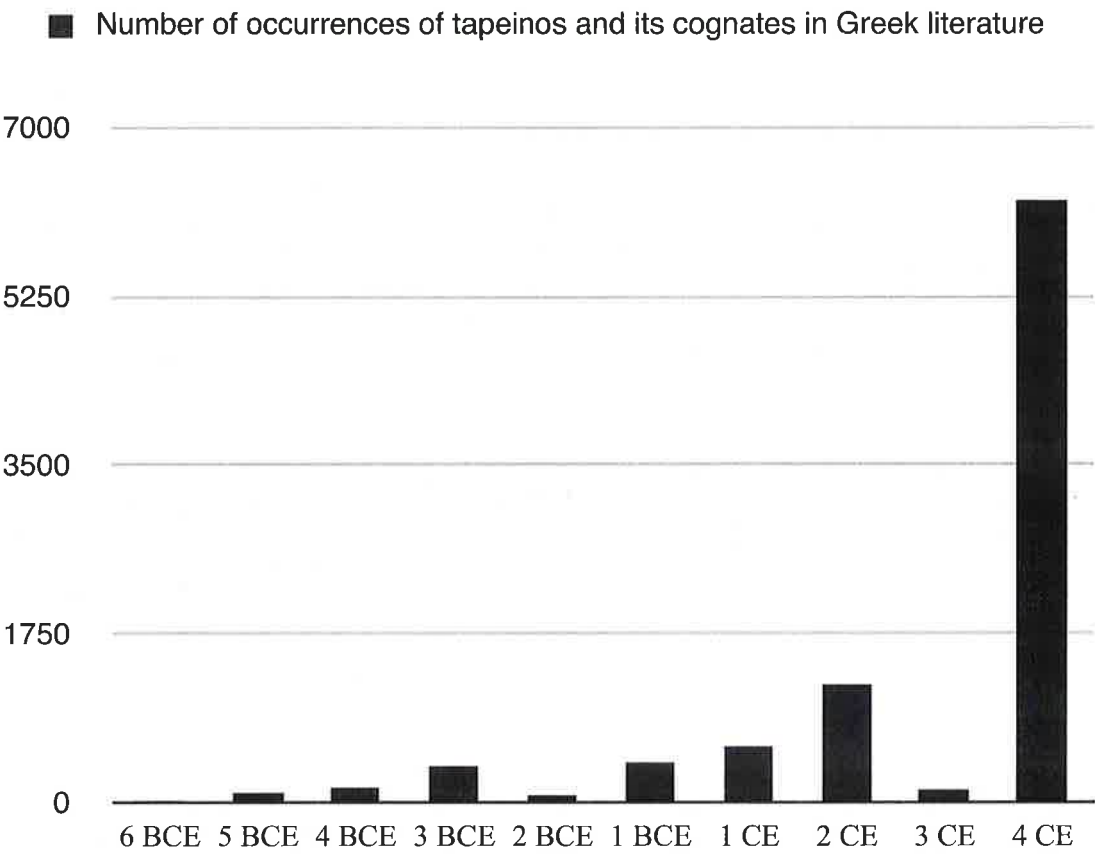
⁴⁰⁴ Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, 8.2. Translation from Xenophon, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961).

In the New Testament, the Greek understanding of the term “humble/humility” is still strong. In Matthew’s gospel, the message of Jesus is clear to the Matthean church. Jesus is among the humble in a socio-economic sense and the church should open her door to the poor and powerless. In his gospel, the idea of humility is more socio-economic than spiritual. Luke tries to deliver the same message to his community. In Mary’s song, she places herself among the humble people in a socio-economic sense. Jesus is born in a poor family and dies the most humiliating death. However, that is exactly how the old wisdom works: “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted (Matthew 23:12, Luke 14:11; 18:14).”

Probably the most surprising discovery in the study of “humble/humility” in the Greek literature is the unique position of the fourth century CE. From the time of Aesop in the 6th century BCE to the time of Theodorus Mopsuestenus, who worked in the last years of the fourth century CE and the beginning years of the fifth century CE, *tapeinos* and its cognates appear in the Greek literature about nine thousand three hundred times. Among them about six thousand appear in the fourth century only. The graph below shows approximate numbers of occurrences of the Greek root *tapein* for each century in Greek literature.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ Even though the chart below shows the number of occurrences of those words in each century, the actual number for each century is not mathematically clear because exact dating of some ancient documents is not possible yet and some authors were writing as they were living in the time of changing centuries.

(Chart 5)



(Table 5)

6 BCE	5 BCE	4 BCE	3 BCE	2 BCE	1 BCE	1 CE	2 CE	3 CE	4 CE
16	99	153	376	74	413	580	1221	130	6245

Of course, the number of writings for sampling in each century is not uniform. For example, the number of works of Greek literature in the sixth century BCE is much smaller than that in the first century BCE, due to time and preservation issues. However,

all this precaution cannot hide the radical change between all the centuries before the fourth century CE and the fourth century CE itself. About two-thirds of nine thousand three hundred occurrences of *tapeinos* and its cognates appear only in the fourth century CE. This amount of data is too big and noticeable to be ignored.

It is noticeable that documents of the third century BCE and the first century BCE have more occurrences of *tapeinos* compared with other centuries before Christianity. This probably is because of documents for the Hellenistic Jews. In the third century, LXX was translated and Sirach contains many instances of the use of those words. In the first century Philo used the word many times also. It is obvious that as Christianity began, the number of occurrences of *tapeinos* got bigger, except for the third century. In the second century, Origen and Galen are two main writers who used *tapeinos* often. Of course, their meanings are different. For Origen, the word *tapeinos* already contains the sense of virtue while for Galen it simply refers to “lowness.” Then, in the fourth century, so many Christian writers suddenly begin to use *tapeinos* more than ever, and most of those occurrences are in the Christian writings. Why did this happen in the fourth century?

ASCETIC MONASTICISM AS COUNTER CULTURE

Countercultures emerge as criticisms of the existing mainstream cultures in human society. The hippies in the United States during the 1960s were a good example. Even though the movement included some socially hard-to-accept practices even for today’s culture, like the use of drugs and freedom of sex, against the mainstream culture in which the African Americans and women were culturally marginalized and underprivileged, it

fought for racial equality and women's rights. In American society where exclusive patriotism abided, it fought for an end to the Vietnam War and for international peace. Against conventional American society, these were the challenges and criticisms raised by the hippies and these were the virtues that the hippies valued and sought.⁴⁰⁶

By the fourth century CE, there was a birth of a counterculture called ascetic monasticism against the mainstream culture of Roman society. It should be noted that most of the literature produced in this century are the treatises of the bishops and letters of the educated elites whose primary concern was largely colored by episcopal rule and political agenda. This implies the lives of the early ascetics known to today is filtered through the language of the religious elites. Even considering that, it is obvious that the ascetic culture of the fourth century CE, led by ascetic monks, renounced what the people of their time would eagerly pursue. They chose pain over comfort, silence over talking, discipline over instinct, and solitude over fellowship.

In the desert, the ascetic monks strived for virtues, which could be translated into their criticism against the mainstream culture. For example, charity was one of the important virtues of the monks that also functioned as a criticism against the society in which people tried to gain more, even when they were already rich. The monks practiced silence that made them search inward in meditation on Scripture and prayer. This turned out to be a criticism of the society where people were busy going about their earthly lives.

⁴⁰⁶ The mode of expressing the hippies' message varied. They used organized or casual street demonstrations. Many artists, like Andy Warhol, expressed their concerns via paintings. However, many would agree that it was best represented by the new genre of rock music led by musicians like Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, or Bob Dylan. Indeed, music was a greatly effective tool for the hippies to spread their philosophy and ethics to the public.

Among all the virtues mentioned by the monastic tradition, humility is one of the main virtues that made monasticism truly a counterculture. Unlike other virtues that the mainstream culture and the desert monks could theoretically agree on, for example, charity, the virtue of humility was a hard and shocking challenge to Greco-Roman society because humility was mostly considered a vice by them. In Greco-Roman literature, it was almost never a term of commendation. It described dishonorable and wretched characters.⁴⁰⁷ The pursuit of the virtue of humility by ascetic monks was an attempt to overturn the Greco-Roman value system in a larger sense.

THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Many abbas and ammas would not hesitate to introduce the virtue of humility as the most important virtue for ascetic monks.⁴⁰⁸ Even considering only *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, one can find more than enough testimonies of abbas and ammas regarding the importance of the virtue of humility. Abba Poemen says that humility is a vital component of life before God: “As the breath which comes out of his nostrils, so does a man need humility and the fear of God.”⁴⁰⁹ He also says, “Life in the monastery demands three things: the first is humility.”⁴¹⁰ Dorotheos of Gaza says, “There is nothing more powerful than lowliness.”⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Robin Fox Lane, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin, 1988), 324.

⁴⁰⁸ For example, Amma Theodora says, “Neither asceticism, nor vigils nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that.” *Sayings*, 84.

⁴⁰⁹ *Sayings*, 173.

⁴¹⁰ *Sayings*, 181.

⁴¹¹ Dorotheos, *Discourses and Sayings*, trans. Eric P. Wheeler, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 33 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 96.

Abba Antony's story tells that humility is the key that can help a monk go through all spiritual difficulties: Anthony said, 'I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, "What can get through from such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, "Humility."' ⁴¹² Amma Syncletica agrees with Anthony in saying, "Just as one cannot build a ship unless one has some nails, so it is impossible to be saved without humility." ⁴¹³

The Lives of the Desert Fathers provides the testimonies of John of Lycopolis concerning the virtue of humility. He says, "And so, my children, first of all let us discipline ourselves to attain humility, since this is the essential foundation of all virtues." ⁴¹⁴ He also states, "Whether you consider yourselves to be among the little ones or the great ones you may make humility your chief aim in the ascetic life." ⁴¹⁵

What then is the definition of humility in the monastic tradition? This is a simple question but requires many answers with a wide spectrum of theology and ethics since there are not many direct, satisfying, and repeated answers on which many abbats and ammas readily agree. One of the ways to approach answering the question is to deduce meaning from its antonym. Baasten observes that it was a common practice among the ancient abbats and ammas to speak about detailed descriptions of the causes and effects of a particular sin, and of its corresponding remedies. ⁴¹⁶ Not surprisingly, many abbats and

⁴¹² *Sayings*, 2.

⁴¹³ *Sayings*, 235.

⁴¹⁴ Norman Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, no. 34, Cistercian Studies Series (Kalamazoo, Mich: Mowbray Cistercian, 1981), 59.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴¹⁶ Matthew Baasten, "Humility and Modern Ethics," *Reformed Review* 38 (1985): 232-237.

ammās would prescribe humility to fight one of the deadly vices, pride. The toxic result of pride is well attested in Psalms that the monks repeatedly sang in their cells and monasteries. “In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” (Psalm 10:4). The Book of Proverbs is full of warnings against pride: “Pride only breeds quarrels” (Proverbs 13:10). “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

Unfortunately, the abbas and ammas had to observe how the practice of asceticism could bring one the temptation of pride. As one’s practice of asceticism is known among people, many wisdom-seeking civilians including government officials would visit the ascetic monk asking for a “word.” If one does not watch and guard his or her heart, it is so easy to fall into the vice of pride. Recognizing this danger of the life style of the ascetic monks, amma Syncletica said, “As long as we are in the monastery, obedience is preferable to asceticism. The one teaches pride, the other humility.”⁴¹⁷ Isidore of Pelusia says, “The heights of humility are great and so are the depths of boasting; I advise you to attend to the first and not to fall into the second.”⁴¹⁸ The idea of humility as an antidote of pride provides one of the ways to see how the ancient monks defined humility, although its definition unavoidably depends on the definition of pride.

One rare attempt to define the virtue of humility in a more direct way is found in a saying of Motius: “For this is humility: To see yourself to be the same as the rest.”⁴¹⁹ Abba Matoes has a different understanding: “...if someone speaks about some topic, do

⁴¹⁷ *Sayings*, 234.

⁴¹⁸ *Sayings*, 98.

⁴¹⁹ *Sayings*, 148.

not argue with him, but if he is right, say, "Yes" if he is wrong, say, "You know what you are saying," and do not argue with him about what he has said. That is humility."⁴²⁰ For Motius, humility is about equality whereas for Matoes, it is about avoiding argument by not judging others with words.

One of the most popular and eloquently refined definitions of humility among the ancient Christian authorities is found in Benedict's Rule of the sixth century CE.

"Humility is the ability to know ourselves as God knows us and to know that it is the little we are that is precisely our claim on God."⁴²¹ In this tradition, true humility is simply a measure of the self that is taken without exaggerated approval or exaggerated guilt.

Bondi's understanding of humility in the monastic orders heavily reflects the Benedictine notion of humility.⁴²² For her, the virtue of humility is more of a spiritual-psychological defense system for the monks, who made tremendous efforts toward pursuing Christian perfection. In their monastic life style, the monks were constantly asked to find out their own faults, mistakes, and ignorance that could create a huge gap between their reality and the goal. They tried hard. They abandoned the comfort of civilization. They fasted. They tried to give up sexual desires. What they had to realize everyday, however, was how far they were from their ideal image of a Christian as they "fell." It could create spiritual and psychological frustration and depression. Eventually, this could lead the monks to cease what they were doing.

⁴²⁰ *Sayings*, 145

⁴²¹ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 73-74

⁴²² Roberta C. Bondi, "Humility: A Meditation on An Ancient Virtue for Modern Christians," *Quarterly Review* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 27.

The real power of humility for the monks was to set them free from sticking with what they had done wrong. As a spiritual and psychological power, humility lets monks recognize their real picture: They are imperfect so they can make mistakes just like Peter made a mistake when he was denying Jesus three times. And as Jesus predicted Peter's mistake, the monks are expected to make mistakes in any given situation. What the monks were required to remember, in that case, is that God would forgive their mistakes and give more wisdom and power to pursue their goal. The greatest mistake any monk can make is to deny God's power of forgiveness and grace that would let the monk bounce back from the depth of committing sins and resume the quest for perfection. The virtue of humility represents this whole cycle of human shortcoming and God's graceful reaction.

This notion of humility was also applicable when they saw the mistakes of others. As they lived in a community of monks or made relationships with the people in town, they unavoidably saw mistakes, sins, and passions in other people. However, the humility of the monks made it easy to forgive others because they knew that they were not better than other people. "A holy man wept bitterly when he saw someone sinning, and said: 'He today: I tomorrow.'"⁴²³

Burton-Christie agrees with Bondi in general, and thus stands on the side of Benedict. For him, the humility of the monks was seeing the real image of themselves: Consciousness of sin and dependence upon God.⁴²⁴ Therefore, for the monks, cultivating

⁴²³ Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism: Selected Translations*, vol. 12 in *Library of Christian Classics* (London: SCM, 1958), 105.

⁴²⁴ Burton-Christie, 238.

the virtue of humility has a double purpose: The first is to have an honest assessment of one's endless capacity for guile and self-deceit; the second is to move in the direction of recognizing that they are incapable of doing anything good. They need "the mercy of God—and of others."⁴²⁵

The benefit of humility, for Burton-Christie, is therapeutic: the virtue of humility is to give spiritual peace to the monks. Knowing oneself in the right way, and knowing how sinful one can be, a monk can develop the capacity to give himself over in a spirit of trust to the source of their salvation. "Humility...refers to a deep confidence in the goodness of God, which is symbolized by a silent, abiding trust."⁴²⁶ As abba Poemen says, "Let go of a small part of your righteousness, and in a few days you will be at rest."⁴²⁷

The Benedictine understanding of humility and the comments of modern scholars on the virtue of humility seem to have their own insights and are convincing. The virtue of humility certainly is the spiritual power of the monks to go about their spiritual journey. After all, virtue (*arete*) means "goodness," "excellence," or the "qualities of fighters,"⁴²⁸ which the ancient monks used to call themselves.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ Ibid, 238.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 239.

⁴²⁷ *Sayings*, 178.

⁴²⁸ *Iliad*, 20.411.

⁴²⁹ Abba Arsenius used to say that one hour's sleep is enough for a monk if he is a good fighter. *Sayings*, 11.

THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY AS POLITICAL RHETORIC

The downside of the Benedictine understanding of humility, however, which is highly spiritual, is that it does not perfectly capture the idea of humility of the early monks in the fourth and fifth century. The Benedictine emphasis on finding the right place for one in God's order is rather closer to the Greek idea of *dikê* (δικη), which has been a virtue of Greeks for a long time. *Dikê* basically means the order of the universe and *dikaïos* is the one who respects and does not violate that order.⁴³⁰ To be *dikaïos* in Homer is not to transgress the order of Zeus; thus in Homer the virtue of the *dikaïos* is to do what the accepted order requires.⁴³¹ However, the Greek word the early monks often took to discuss the virtue of humility is not *dikê* but *tapeinos* (ταπεινός). Abba Bessarion says, "When you are at peace, without having to struggle, humiliate yourself (μᾶλλον ταπεινοῦ) for fear of being led astray by joy which is inappropriate."⁴³² A voice says to Arsenius, "These men...do not humble themselves so as to correct themselves (οὐκ ἐταπεινωθησαν) and walk in the humble way of Christ (τῇ ταπεινῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ)."⁴³³ Most of all, when Jesus said, "I am humble in heart," it was *tapeinos* that Matthew uses.

The larger context of the Greco-Roman world was not familiar with the notion of *tapeinos* as a virtue at all, as shown in chapter four. For ordinary people in the

⁴³⁰ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Englewood, Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 161.

⁴³¹ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 126.

⁴³² *Sayings*, 42.

⁴³³ *Sayings*, 16

mainstream culture of Greco-Roman society, humility could simply mean being humiliated. It is the situation one does not want to be in: poor, socially marginalized, politically oppressed, or morally degraded. If so then, frequent explanation of what the monks meant by humility would be necessary since the definition of humility is radically different from that of the world. But considering the importance of the virtue of humility in their spiritual quest and frequent use of it, the monks mainly stayed surprisingly silent in defining the word.

It is this silence that speaks loudly about how ascetic monks pictured the image of humility. By humility, ascetic monks meant what ordinary people in the Roman society meant. The idea of humility understood by the ascetic monks is well represented in the life style and the ascetic practices of the ancient monks. To be humble was to bear the image of the *humilitas* and *tapeinos* in society.

The monks lived without proper means of surviving. They lived in a cell with a piece of bread for a day or a week, or wore a rag for months regardless of seasons.⁴³⁴ Sometimes they lived without taking a bath for months. They were asked to obey rather than to quarrel with each other, to forgive rather than judge others, and to bear dishonor while remaining voiceless. They were to be passive like the dead. Abba Moses says, "The monk must die to everything before leaving the body, in order not to harm anyone."⁴³⁵ All these were the marks of the socially, economically, and politically marginalized people called "the humble." The difference is that while the world was trying to avoid this kind

⁴³⁴ Athanasius, *The Life of Antony; and, the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Philip Schaff (London: SPCK, 1980), 36.

⁴³⁵ *Sayings*, 141.

of life, the Christian monks were trying to embrace it, which made ascetic monasticism truly a counterculture.

Why would Christian monks try to bear the image of the humble if they understood what it meant to society? For example, they tried to live the life of poverty, which always was tied together with the concept of humility. According to Athanasius, Antony sold his family property, gave his possession away to others, and went to the desert in order to take up an alternative Christian lifestyle. There were many who joined him in his life style. "They took up their lives of renunciation of property, family ties, social position, claims on the future."⁴³⁶ This life of poverty continued to be a tradition of the monastic monks for the following centuries. Thus, centuries later, the sixth degree of humility can be shown, the Benedict's Rule tells, "When a monk is content with the meanest and worst of everything."⁴³⁷

As a core value of monasticism as a counter culture, the virtue of humility unavoidably became political rhetoric. There were monastic messages to the world conveyed by their practice of humility. Burton-Christie rightly observes that the origin of humility as a virtue should be viewed in light of the monastic zeal to follow the way of Christ.⁴³⁸ Jesus himself depicted his life as, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Jesus spoke of himself, "I am humble (ταπεινός) in heart" (Matthew 11:29). In Paul's teaching, Jesus emptied himself (Philippians 2:7), humbled himself, and obeyed unto death (Philippians

⁴³⁶ Bondi, "Humility: A Meditation on An Ancient Virtue for Modern Christians," 30.

⁴³⁷ Benedict of Nursia, *Rule for Monasteries* 7, in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1981), 201.

⁴³⁸ Burton-Christie, 242-245.

2:8), even though he was God in nature. The image of Jesus' life was that of the socially, economically, and politically marginalized people and it became the model life of the monks.⁴³⁹

The picture of Jesus' death was worse than his life. He endured the most humiliating death a human being could have in the Roman society: crucifixion. Therefore, it was not difficult for the church fathers to see the idea of humility in Jesus' suffering. For instance, the appearance of Jesus in suffering explains what humility is about in the theology of Clement of Rome:

He grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.⁴⁴⁰

Although Clement mentions humility as an antidote of pride elsewhere,⁴⁴¹ it is obvious that the image of humility in his mind refers to the situation of the socially, economically, and politically marginalized people: slaves, orphans, strangers, the sick, children, and women.

The ideal life for the monks was going through a life of afflictions, enduring hunger, sadness, insults, trials, and dishonor for the sake of Christ. However, suffering

⁴³⁹ The old man said unto him, "If now He who did make them came into this world in humility, why dost thou who art much boast thyself?" Athanasius, et al., *The Paradise Or Garden of the Holy Fathers: Being Histories of the Anchorites, Recluses, Monks, Coenobites, and Ascetic Fathers of the Deserts of Egypt Between A.D. Ccl and A.D. Cccc Circiter*, ed. 'Anān Īshō ', trans. Ernest A. W. Budge (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907), 110.

⁴⁴⁰ Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ch. 16. Text taken from Isaiah 53: 2-3 (NRSV).

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., ch. 2, 13,

itself was not the goal of ascetic life. Quite the opposite, it was peace, rest, and honor promised in the gospels: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).⁴⁴² John the Dwarf retells the story in a different way:

There was an old man who sat at the philosophers’ gate and he used to insult everyone who entered it. When he insulted this young man, the boy began to laugh, and the old man said, ‘Why are you laughing, when I have insulted you?’ He told him, ‘Would you not expect me to laugh? For three years I have paid to be insulted and now I am insulted free of charge. That is why I laughed.’ Abba John said, ‘The gate of the Lord is like that, and we Fathers go through many insults in order to enter joyfully into the city of God.’⁴⁴³

Another promise of Jesus that the monks often referred to as they talked about humility is found in the Beatitudes. In this Jesus promises the poor, the meek, the hungry, and the persecuted that there will be a reward for the suffering they experience. Poverty, meekness, hunger, and being persecuted are the everyday stories of the *tapeinoi* in Greco-Roman society and the monks embraced them in their ascetic life as a way to achieve their goal. Abba Evagrius encourages the monks by saying, “Consider also the good things in store for the righteous: confidence in the face of God the Father and His Son, the angels and archangels and all the people of the saints, the kingdom of heaven, and the gifts of that realm, joy and beatitude.”⁴⁴⁴ Naturally, this is related to another promise of Jesus found in Matthew 20:27: “And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your

⁴⁴² In this sense, the practice of ascetic monks reflects the philosophy of Cynics. See William D. Desmond, *The Greek Praise of Poverty: Origins of Ancient Cynicism* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

⁴⁴³ *Sayings*, 95.

⁴⁴⁴ *Sayings*, 63.

servant” (Mark 10:44, Luke 22:26), which is interpreted in Abba Poemen’s saying, “The greatness of a man consisteth of humility, for in proportion as a man descendeth to humility, he becometh exalted to greatness.”⁴⁴⁵

Monasticism, on the other hand, as a counterculture was not only against the secular culture of Roman society but also potentially against the rapidly growing establishment of the state church under Constantine.⁴⁴⁶ Although few ascetic leaders in the desert predate Constantine (for example, Antony), it should be noted that the rise of desert monasticism was paired with the rise of the state-church. Phenomenologically, as the state started backing the church politically and financially,⁴⁴⁷ many Christians decided not to take pleasure in the peaceful church but to “flee” to the desert area where spiritual battles abounded.

By distancing themselves from the state church and retreating to the desert life, ascetic monks symbolically reminded the church what the church was supposed to be. Through their new life style, they functioned as a counterculture to the new church under/with Constantine and his government.⁴⁴⁸ It is not surprising to observe, thus, that the

⁴⁴⁵ *Paradise*, 108.

⁴⁴⁶ Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Rodney Clapp sarcastically states, “The question is no longer, “How can we survive and remain faithful Christians under Caesar?” but “How can we adjust the church’s expectations so that Caesar can consider himself a faithful Christian?” See Rodney Clapp, “Practicing the Politics of Jesus,” in *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. Michael L. Budde, and Robert W. Brimlow (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 17.

⁴⁴⁸ “The hermit was a living criticism of ecclesiastical society. The mere fact of his (Antony) retirement proved that in his estimation the church had become an impossible dwelling place for anyone who wished to lead a really Christian life, and this judgment was founded upon an ideal of religious life which differed markedly from that of the church.” L. Duchesne, and Claude Jenkins, *Early History of the Christian Church, from Its Foundation to the End of the Fifth Century* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1909), 390.

fourth century monastic movement sometimes had awkward relationships with the church.⁴⁴⁹

In the center of this countercultural movement of the ascetic monks was the virtue of humility. It embraced the disposition and life style of the socially, economically, and politically outcast as a virtue, as found in a saying of Abba Moses: “Bear disgrace and affliction in the name of Jesus with humility and a troubled heart.”⁴⁵⁰ The virtue of humility practiced in the ascetic life of the monks was a powerfully inspirational force for the Christians who tried to find a new identity in the context where there was no institutional persecution any more. Although in this new lifestyle there are so many spiritual meanings attached, it is undeniable that this lifestyle displays the desert monks’ solidarity with the socially outcast, so that they were shown to be true followers of Christ.

After all, the virtue of humility in its pure form was the attitude of the *tapeinos*. It is low self-esteem coupled with passiveness and vulnerability that could be interpreted as close to cowardice in Greek culture. Therefore, as a virtue, it was considered to be the opposite of the attitude of any socially prestigious group. This understanding of *tapeinos* is expressed in the monks’ intentional attempt to keep their distance from wealth or political power. Abba Chomas’ last words to his son were, “Do not have anything to do with rulers, then your hands will not be opened to gather together, but open to give.”⁴⁵¹ In the same manner, the *Sayings* reports, “One day Abba Antony received a letter from the Emperor Constantius, asking him to come to Constantinople and he wondered whether he

⁴⁴⁹ See Henry Chadwick, “Bishops and Monks,” *Studia Patristica* 24 (1993): 45-61.

⁴⁵⁰ *Paradise*, 50.

⁴⁵¹ *Sayings*, 244.

ought to go. So he asked Abba Paul, his disciple. 'Ought I to go?' He replied, 'If you go, you will be called Antony; but if you stay here, you will be called Abba Antony.'⁴⁵²

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

If the virtue of humility, the attitude of *tapeinos*, is to be pursued by all Christians, it may create a problem: a collision between poverty viewed as a virtue and the existence of the rich in the church. Even before the rise of ascetic monasticism, by 200 CE, Clement of Alexandria already knew this dangerous possibility. In his time, the Christian church already began to receive many wealthy people who would have a problem with Jesus' counsel to the young rich ruler (Mark 10),⁴⁵³ which puts emphasis on the life of *tapeinos* as a necessary condition to be saved. In dealing with this problem, Clement establishes a new way to go around the challenge: "It (Jesus' counsel to the young man) should not be understood literally. The Savior teaches his people nothing in a merely human way, but everything by a divine and mystical wisdom."⁴⁵⁴ Out of this preposition, Clement quickly reaches this conclusion: "The rich man is not to fling away the substance that belongs to him, but to banish from the soul its opinions about riches, its attachment to them, its excessive desire, its morbid excitement over them, its anxious cares, the thorns of our earthly existence which choke the seed of the true life."⁴⁵⁵ Thus, Clement theologically

⁴⁵² *Sayings*, 8.

⁴⁵³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Rich Man's Salvation* in *The Loeb Classical Library*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 270-367.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 281-283.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 291-293.

affirmed, as a bishop rather than a theologian, that there might be a door to make the concept of humility more of a spiritual affair rather than a socio-economic one.

The dilemma the church was facing in the fourth century was what Clement had been trying to resolve. They had to come up with a new idea that could help the church stick with the spiritual purity represented by the ascetic monks and at the same time keep the accumulating political and financial power of the church represented by the bishops. Meanwhile, they observed, unfortunately for the leaders of the church in the fourth century, that the ascetic monks were gaining more spiritual authority by clarifying their withdrawal from episcopal Christianity.⁴⁵⁶ People were impressed by the literal poverty of the ascetic monks while the leaders of the church were seeing the intellectual need to make sense of the presence of two antithetical concepts in the Church: the virtue of humility practiced by the ascetic monks, and the political power of the church while keeping the church more wealthy as many aristocrats converted to Christianity.⁴⁵⁷ People praised the practice of obedience and forgiveness out of humility while the new job description of the church under Constantine included making regulations for people, finding faults in them, and condemning the “evil doers” if necessary.

Rapp rightly observes that the leaders of the church with apostolic authority needed the spiritual and ascetic authority of the ascetic monks to more effectively rule the

⁴⁵⁶ David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 81.

⁴⁵⁷ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1996), 29-33.

new Christian world.⁴⁵⁸ It would be the best combination for the life of the church.

However, the bishops with apostolic authority and the monks with humility represent two antithetical concepts that cannot easily be synthesized.⁴⁵⁹ One represents episcopal power and the other individual powerlessness.

The merger of two antitheses was observed in the beginning of the late fourth century. The elites of the church began to more actively embrace the practice of asceticism including sexual renunciation that effectively fortified their authority as leaders at least in part. If the bishops could embrace asceticism, it was also possible, in theory, that ascetic monks could take the responsibility of the church leaders. However, the concept of humility in its pure form understood by the ascetic monks was a huge philosophical barrier that kept the monks from taking any leadership in the world. The virtue of humility required a monk to think “himself inferior to all creatures.”⁴⁶⁰ It required a monk not to pass judgment in any case. Theodore of Eleutheropolis said, “And he who said, ‘Do not commit fornication,’ also said, ‘Do not judge.’”⁴⁶¹ It required the monks to forgive. “Abba Poemen said about Abba Isidore that wherever he addressed the brothers in church he said only one thing, ‘Forgive your brother, so that you also may be

⁴⁵⁸ See Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage*, vol. 37 (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2005).

⁴⁵⁹ Chadwick, 45.

⁴⁶⁰ *Sayings*, 237.

⁴⁶¹ *Sayings*, 80.

forgiven.”⁴⁶² Under these kinds of limitations, it was virtually impossible for the ascetic monks to take a leadership role in which they had to rule and judge.

Although the virtue of humility in the monastic tradition was a political challenge to the state church gaining more wealth and power, there was no major collision between the two. The leaders, both of the church and of the monastic tradition, found rather a surprisingly simple solution to marry the church leadership and the virtue of humility: The concept of obedience, one of the most important evidences of one’s virtue of humility. Obedience truly was a measure of one’s virtue of humility for the monastic monks. Theodore of Pherme said to a brother, “Go, be more humble in your aspirations, place yourself under obedience and live with others.”⁴⁶³ It was said to be a superior virtue over other virtues. One day, four monks of Scetis came to Abba Pambo and discussed four virtues of their neighbors: fasting, poverty, charity, and the one who had lived for twenty-two years in obedience to an old man. Abba Pambo said to them, “I tell you, the virtue of this last one is the greatest...the last one, restraining his own will, does the will of another. Now it is of such men that the martyrs are made, if they persevere to the end.”⁴⁶⁴

In many stories of the ascetic monks, however, the obedience of the humble seems to be mostly toward their teachers often called, “old man.” One of the classic

⁴⁶² *Sayings*, 98. A similar saying is found in *Paradise*, 47. “Tell me, O brother, dost thou possess the seal of the service, that is to say, humility? For the holy man who seeth another man sin weepeth bitterly, saying, “It is this man who sinneth now, but some time subsequently it may be myself. However much then a man may sin before thee, condemn him not, but esteem thyself a sinner far greater than he is, even though he may be a child of this world, and besides there is the fact that he may have sinned greatly against God.””

⁴⁶³ *Sayings*, 74.

⁴⁶⁴ *Sayings*, 196.

stories about obedience is found in the story of John the Dwarf. His teacher planted a piece of dry wood and said to John, 'Water it every day with a bottle of water, until it bears fruit.' Although the water was so far away that he had to leave in the evening and return the following morning, he obeyed the "old man." After three years, they could eat the fruit of obedience.⁴⁶⁵ Another story tells of Abba John, the disciple of Abba Paul who was famous for his obedience. One day, they were having trouble with a hyena. The "old man" said to John jokingly, "If she sets upon you, tie her up and bring her here." And by his obedience, John did it!⁴⁶⁶

One of the best examples of the church's effort to smooth out the relationship between monasticism and the state church is found in Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*. First, Athanasius emphasizes that Antony is humble and that would be the model of all Christians, specifically the ascetic monks. As the Greek word *tapeinos* would imply, Antony sold all of his possessions and gave the profit to the poor so that he became one of them. When he died, he left only two things: His sheepskin and his worn-out cloak, which was tangible evidence of his humble life. But the evidence of his humility is not only found in his poverty but also in his obedience to the church's authority. "He was tolerant in disposition and humble of soul. Though the sort of man he was, he honored the rule of the Church with extreme care, and he wanted every cleric to be held in higher regard than himself. He felt no shame at bowing the head to the bishops and priests."⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ *Sayings*, 86.

⁴⁶⁶ *Sayings*, 109.

⁴⁶⁷ Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, 81.

According to Athanasius, Antony's humility was not just in taking a position of the *tapeinos* but being loyal to orthodoxy, which unavoidably implies Antony's opposition of any erratic teachings other than the teachings of the "orthodox doctrine." Antony was "free of confusion" so that "in things having to do with belief, he was truly wonderful and orthodox."⁴⁶⁸ This humility of Antony coupled with his loyalty to orthodox doctrine led him to fight any heresies. "Perceiving their wickedness and apostasy from the outset, he never held communion with the Meletian schismastics. And neither toward the Manichaeans nor toward any other heretics did he profess friendship, except to the extent of urging the change to the right belief...So in the same way he abhorred the heresy of the Arians, and he ordered everyone neither to go near them nor to share their erroneous belief."⁴⁶⁹

Athanasius, in his writing, does not deny the socio-economic concept of humility. Rather, he embraces it in order to create more spiritual authority. However, he tidily adds one more color to the virtue of humility: direction. Antony was a humble man not because he was obedient to everybody but because he was primarily obedient to Christ represented by the orthodox doctrine. Thus, the humility of Antony could create a powerful weapon that could defend the Church from the attack of heresies, specifically

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 82. One day some Arians came to see Abba Sisoës on Abba Antony's mountain and they began to speak against the orthodox faith. The old man gave them no answer but he called his disciple and said to him, 'Abraham, bring me the book of Saint Athanasius and read it.' Then they were silent as their heresy was unmasked and he sent them away in peace. See *Sayings*, 217.

Arianism. In Egypt, thus, Athanasius' intimacy with the monasteries soon began producing some monk-bishops, fortified with the leadership in the world in humility.⁴⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

In the center of the monastic movement as a counterculture to Roman society in the fourth century, there was the virtue of humility, one of the most important virtues for the ascetic monks. It was a spiritual disposition toward God, oneself, and others as defined by Benedict and a few other monks. However, it also emerged as a political idea that brought a critical challenge to the church as the church was gaining political and economic power under Constantine.

The virtue of humility was central to a monastic way of living the life of the economically, politically, and socially marginalized people called *tapeinos*, which Jesus' life and death reached to the culmination of it. Combined with the practices of asceticism, the virtue of humility had profound implications for Christians under Constantine: Political and financial security was promised to the church but it was not always appreciated. As positioned in the core of monasticism, the virtue of humility of the ascetic monks and the leadership of the elite Christians of the state church were antithetical concepts to each other. One found its identity from detachment and the other from

⁴⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it is not so clear if the church could always have a chance to enjoy and celebrate, when needed, the obedience of the ascetic monks. A story says that it was not the case always. "One day the priests were having a hard time with a man possessed with a devil in Scetis. To drive the devil out, they came up with an idea of bringing Abba Bessarion from the desert. But they worried because "If we call him, he will not come, even to the church."" See *Sayings*, 41.

embrace. Thus, the virtue of humility in the fourth century was a counter balance that tried to bring the church back to her original position: Living the life of Jesus the humble.

The political need for unification between church leadership and monastic humility found a point of contact: the idea of obedience. The virtue of humility required the monks to humbly obey the authority of the church, and thus to defend orthodox doctrine against wrong teachings, as Antony did to the Arians. It was rather a natural consequence of the concept of humility; however, church leaders like Athanasius accelerated the process.

Athanasius' effort to twist the idea of humility to serve the purpose of the church is just one example of how the idea of humility interacted with the surrounding political needs. It might be a small start. But, it was a beginning of the further development of the idea of humility to be one of the main ideas to control Christians of the following centuries under the authority of the Church.

CONCLUSION

What the Hebrew Bible teaches is that the idea of humble/humility never departs from its negative socio-economic and political connotation. The most common Hebrew root *'anah* and its equivalents usually refer to suffering, subjugation, affliction, poverty, or even rape. This understanding is most clear in the Greek literature. In the Greco-Roman culture, being humble or taking on humility is not recommended for people. It is understood as a vice. The Greek root *tapein*, which is the most common root for humble/humility language in the New Testament and the early church literature, refers to poverty, abjection, being oppressed, cowardice, or lowness.

In the context of first-century Israel, Jesus' self description, "I am humble," is a surprising proclamation of his solidarity with his audience, specifically the congregation of the Matthean church. Like other people in his days, Jesus has his own share of being poor, oppressed, lonely, and despised. His friendship with the sinners and socially outcast is rather a natural outcome. In this light, Jesus' statement, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58, NRSV) can be understood not only as a figure of speech but also as a precise description of his economic status.

The identity of Jesus as an economically poor and socially low Jewish man, with his strong solidarity with the poor and the despised, is pastorally picked up by Matthew

and Luke to be an inspiration for the lives of the early Christians. If they were to be the true followers of Jesus and believe the promise of the kingdom of God, where the “humble” are exalted, there should not be high or low people among Christians.

For the first three hundred years, the Christian church was under either Jewish or Roman persecution. Even though the persecutions often were partial and sporadic in time and place, Christians were relatively under conditions of what the Greek term *tapeinos* might refer to. They had apostles, bishops, and deacons, which might suggest the existence of a religious hierarchy, but it was not viewed as a threatening force to the Church.

Two obvious problems arose in the fourth century. First, the church became free from persecution, in a general sense. The Roman empire started to support the church politically and financially. This was a problem because Christians had to go through a huge transition theologically, politically, and psychologically. They had to experience an identity crisis. Second, there was a rise of ascetic monasticism. This was a problem to episcopal church because it was gaining spiritual authority, probably more than the bishops’ authority in many cases, through the practice of asceticism and poverty, the visible expression of the Greek sense of humility. Combined together, it introduced a whole new kind of problem for the welfare of the church. While the ascetic monks were promoting humility as the first virtue of all, this turned out to be a pressing propaganda issue against the state church that was gaining much wealth and political power.

The fourth century Christians paying extensive attention to the virtue of humility, more than in any other century in history by a huge margin, implies that Christians were

having trouble with their new identity as a safeguarded religion. Suffering and political affliction had established Christian identity for about three hundred years but finally it was disturbed by Constantine. Here the virtue of humility became one expression of Christian discomfort toward the church under Roman government, even though it was smoothed by the church leaders in many cases because they all knew what humility would mean to the people: It always carried political, economic, and social meaning. It was not purely a spiritual attitude before God.

Today, the socio-economic understanding of humility is not a popular idea. At least, the church is not ready to welcome that kind of understanding because it may imply something the leaders of the church do not want to see. Today, the management of the church is deeply based on capitalism. Money is a big issue. In many cases, the effectiveness of the clergy and the church is measured by how many members and how much money are involved in ministry. Building multi-million-dollar auditoriums and gyms is not strange at all these days. Even though many Christians might express their disgust with the prosperity gospel, it has become a controlling theology for many preachers.

Christians deserve to wonder, at least once in a while, if everything they practice is rightly tuned with the teachings of Scripture. It might be their duty to doubt their Christian-ness as pictured and offered by mainline Christianity. They have to question if the existence of mega-churches, much oriented to a capitalist agenda in today's American society, is what Jesus was imagining. They have to ask if what they pursue actually engenders despair to the economically poor, socially lowly, and politically outcast that

Jesus identified with. They have to reflect, in their life style, the teachings of the Prophets and Writings where the humble in a socio-economic sense are the blessed ones. They have to pay attention to what the ascetic monks tried to say to the Church through their life.

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